Distinguished Leader
2022

2022 DISTINGUISHED LEADERS CIRCLE
INDUCTEES ANNOUNCED
Two leaders inducted into 2022 Distinguished Leaders Circle

Leaders who’ve paved the path for many in the profession. Mentors who’ve given their time, knowledge, and expertise to push the profession and CoreNet Global forward. Trailblazers who have led the charge and laid an innovative path that many have followed.

It is because of these accomplishments that David Radcliffe, and Karen Ellzey, will be inducted into the Distinguished Leaders Circle in 2022. These corporate real estate (CRE) leaders will be honored in an induction ceremony at the CoreNet Global Summit Recognition Dinner in Chicago on November 3rd.

The Distinguished Leaders Circle is designed to pay tribute to those members who have demonstrated a lifetime of leadership that has helped define and shape the corporate real estate profession through their body of work. While CoreNet Global has a number of awards based upon individual or group performance on a particular project or for a given year, the association had yet to recognize those who have career-long legacies of service and leadership within the association – and the profession as a whole. This recognition is deemed the highest honor to be bestowed upon a member.

To learn more about the Distinguished Leaders Circle, its selection criteria and application process, visit www.corenetglobal.org.
Those who know Karen Ellzey are quick to commend both her industry accomplishments and the personal qualities that have made her a distinguished leader and an impactful force in the corporate real estate profession.

Ellzey’s career in real estate spans more than two decades, and for much of that time she was among the highest-ranking female executives at CBRE. She has played a significant role in shaping the industry with a particular focus on the intersection of the end user and service provider, helping to shape those entities into one creative and collaborative team. “She has been a visionary for corporate real estate and has helped countless CRE leaders – clients or not – become better at what they do,” says William Concannon, global group president, strategic business sponsorships at CBRE. She also has envisioned and then helped implement many industry “firsts” that have become a fundamental part of how corporate real estate leaders do their jobs, notes Concannon.

Notably, Ellzey developed the first service delivery playbooks across integrated, end-to-end CRE life cycles that focused on strategic business unit engagement, process excellence, portfolio-wide consistency, client value creation, technology enablement and continuous improvement. She also codified CRE business-
centric strategies and models, such as CRM; training and coaching CRE teams on how to enhance strategic and proactive business unit engagement by developing portfolio strategies and solutions; and also coaching clients on board-level presentations and business cases.

Her introduction of service delivery playbooks has been recognized as a critical step in assisting change management and implementing new processes. Her championing of real estate professionals’ efforts to engage fully with their internal business partners and her ability to help them figure how best to leverage their service provider partners in that effort was also very impactful, adds Sarah Abrams, senior vice president, global real estate at Iron Mountain. “She believes as a going in proposition that the strategic partnership between a CRE end user and the service provider is the best way to deliver value to the ultimate client,” says Abrams. “She promotes that and teaches that in all her interactions. She has been a mentor to many and helped everyone, including me, become better at what we do.”

Colleagues describe her abundance of standout qualities, including her commitment, empathy, communication skills and critical thinking from different perspectives. All of these qualities were brought forward and tested to the max in the first six months of the pandemic. “Karen bravely took on leadership of our response to clients, our support to clients, and our communications internally and externally,” says Matt Werner, global president, client care at CBRE. At the time, Werner was responsible for the firm’s HSE (safety) and the FM platform overall. “I was grinding with the team every hour of every day agonizing about our technicians and facilities personnel who were not able to shelter in place. We were often overwhelmed. We had little information, high stakes, shifting sands, lots of questions, and plenty of personal worry,” says Werner. “Karen rallied the team every day and led us forward. I know I could not have done it without her. It was a very trying time and Karen’s leadership was relentless and inspiring.”

**CRE journey**

Like many, Ellzey didn’t start out aspiring to a career in CRE. It was her long-time interest in industrial design, architecture, energy and sustainability that made it a natural fit. Her entry into the industry began when she was engaged by Trammell Crow Company (TCC) as a consultant to help formalize and optimize operational components of what has become CBRE’s Global Workplace Solutions (GWS) business.

“When CBRE acquired TCC in 2006, it was a transformational moment, not only for these two companies, but arguably for the industry,” notes Ellzey. CBRE’s strategy was to respond to CRE leaders’ growing demands for global, full-service capabilities – something that didn’t exist at the time. Once the deal was closed, Ellzey was appointed to the global executive committee of the new entity, becoming part of the leadership team that would go on to define and drive business strategy for this line of business for many years to come.

When she first joined Trammell Crow, the firm had annual revenue of $800 million and about 20 occupier clients. Today, CBRE is a Fortune #122 corporation with annual revenue of $27.7B. CBRE’s GWS segment alone generates $15.3 billion in revenue and serves 500+ occupier clients in 100 countries.

In Ellzey’s early days at TCC, Concannon challenged her and others to be the kind of company that committed to advancing the profession of corporate real estate. “Karen more than anyone I have ever worked with in my career completely owned that role of committing herself to the corporate real estate industry,” he says. “She instinctively knew that if we completely committed ourselves to advancing the profession of our clients, we would help them succeed and the profession would survive and expand and endure, and of course, that is what happened.”

For the majority of her career, Ellzey was part of a leadership team that formulated and executed a strategy to build global, full-service capabilities to serve CRE clients worldwide. Her key areas of responsibility have included overseeing CBRE’s consulting practices, developing advanced delivery model solutions, helping clients build CRM capabilities, and helping to evolve CBRE’s client-centric account management model. During her tenure, Ellzey also founded CBRE’s Workplace Strategy and Business Analytics practices, as well as the CBRE Institute. She also supported numerous mergers over the years, including CBRE’s acquisition of Johnson Controls’ Global Workplace Solutions business. During the COVID 19 pandemic, Ellzey and her team led CBRE’s Crisis Management and Response efforts in support of its CRE clients.
**Teacher and mentor**

A long-time member of CoreNet Global’s New England Chapter, Ellzey has also served as a global board member and faculty member, provided programming support across multiple CoreNet Global chapters and helped to drive key research studies, including the CoRE 2010 research initiative. She also co-led the Integrated Resource and Infrastructure Solutions (IRIS) research track, which posited the necessity for CRE to become more strategically aligned with the business and effectively integrate with other key functions, such as HR, IT, procurement and finance to optimize and support business outcomes.

Ellzey has been a thoughtful presenter, teacher and mentor for many, including clients, peers and up-and-coming young CRE professionals. She also has a reputation as a “connector” – bringing people together who benefit from new relationships, as well as bringing people together to share ideas and discuss industry issues. It is not only that she has done all this great work over the course of her career, but she has this very big “human piece” that she brings that includes an innate ability to connect with people and inspire people to do the work – even when it is really hard and challenging, note Abrams. “She is fully invested in the people she works with, the clients she works with and the industry she services and she has great passion around it,” she adds.

On a professional level, one of the biggest challenges Ellzey frequently encountered related to helping CRE teams establish strategic alignment with the core business and effectively leverage service providers to build a high-functioning extended team with everyone rowing in the same direction. “Too often, I saw CRE teams and partners fall prey to an “us vs. them” dynamic which, if allowed to persist, could become a self-fulfilling prophecy – ultimately benefiting no one,” notes Ellzey.

On a personal level, one of the biggest things Ellzey has learned is that change truly is the constant, and that change is always required to drive growth and improvement of any kind. “While it’s human nature to resist change, I have learned that it’s far better to anticipate and be the author – or at least, a party to – change when it is necessary to get the hard, right things done. I believe we need to challenge conventional thinking about “change management” and focus more on “change leadership” if we are going to chart the future success of our industry and the CRE profession,” she says.

Ellzey has been married to her husband Tim Wright for the past 31 years and is the proud stepmother of one daughter – a playwright who lives in New York. Since retiring in April 2022, she has more time for her creative interests, including drawing, painting, music and writing; outdoor activities such as tennis, biking, hiking and kayaking; and prairie and habitat restoration on their family property in southwest Wisconsin.

As always, she remains passionate about helping others and continues to coach and support diverse aspiring leaders interested in pursuing careers in business and CRE, and she is exploring future involvement with a non-profit board.
When it comes to examples of innovative workplace leaders, Google is frequently at the top of that list. The person responsible for building and leading teams that continually scale, evolve and innovate Google’s dynamic workplace environment for the past 16 years is David Radcliffe.

As vice president of Real Estate & Workplace Services and Global Security & Resilience Services, Radcliffe was responsible for managing all aspects of Google’s global real estate portfolio, industry-leading workplace services and physical security services that enable the company to thrive. In the early years of Google’s growth, he pushed the boundaries in areas of workspace environments, food, events, transportation, amenities, sustainability and air quality.

“We’re fortunate at Google to have true geniuses in the founders, Larry (Page) and Sergey (Brin). They really deserve all of the credit for two important things,” says Radcliffe. “They truly believed that the way you organize the built environment could accelerate the innovation process. They also had that same shared belief in healthy environments. They understood that the air we breathe and access to natural light actually increased wellbeing and health. So, if you wanted long-term healthy employees, you had to have those things in the environment.”

While Page and Brin set that stage for innovation with their mindset and beliefs, it was Radcliffe’s job to develop and execute real estate strategy and key initiatives. During his tenure, Google has grown exponentially at a fast pace, which required scaling solutions to match that growth. Google’s Real Estate & Workplace Services group now serves some 175,000+ employees in more than 180 cities and 60 countries.

“For most people, that growth alone would be all-encompassing to solve for. However, Dave used this rare opportunity to not just solve for Google’s workplace and buildings, but to work on innovative solutions that could be scalable to the whole industry,” says Michelle Kaufmann, Google’s director of R+D for the built environment. Ultimately, this meant creating extraordinary experiences for people in places where they are productive and creative with high levels of wellbeing all at developer costs and schedules. Otherwise, it would only result in one or two places and maybe positively impact a few thousand people, she says. “Dave wanted us to always think and solve bigger. How do we create incredible projects that both solve for those thousands of people but could be scalable to millions after that?” she adds.
Google’s Real Estate & Workplace Services team has delivered numerous innovative projects and initiatives. “He has an ability to really push people to deliver the impossible. He has created the environment for people to think creatively, challenge the norms and challenge the industry,” says Jennifer Kelly, vice president of Real Estate & Workplace Experience at Google. Google has facilities all over the world. Radcliffe understands the cultural nuances that exist and the need for projects to reflect the people who are working in a particular place so that it is not a cookie cutter experience, she adds.

His leadership was critical in developing Google’s first campus, Bay View and Charleston East, which is the largest project to be Living Building Challenge certified. Bay View transforms sustainability with an all-electric campus totaling 1.1 million square feet, is net water positive and houses the largest geothermal pile system in North America. Radcliffe wanted to share the lessons learned with everyone, and all of the information on the projects are available on a publicly accessible website and a free downloadable book.

One of the accomplishments that Radcliffe is most proud of is Google’s commitment to innovation in sustainability and the company’s ongoing efforts to continue to push the boundaries. In 2007, Google was one of the first companies globally to be carbon neutral. Getting to that point involved using offsets and PPA agreements. “We looked at that and said, ‘we can do better.’ So, we changed the goal line to be 100% renewable,” says Radcliffe. By 2017, the firm was using 100% renewable. From there, decarbonizing the workplace became the new high bar and Google’s goal is to reach that by 2030.

One of the qualities that make Radcliffe stand out as a leader is his authenticity. He also has hired an amazing team of subject matter experts and life experts, and he really embraces the need for diversity of thought, background and approach on his teams, notes Kelly. “He has built teams based on not only, what is the core skill that we need, but who are the people that we need,” she says. “He has always encouraged us as a team to continue to build that diversity, because when you want to do things differently and be able to change the way things are done, you need that diversity of person and diversity of thought.”

Path to leadership

Radcliffe will be the first to acknowledge that the stepping stones that led him to Google lined up somewhat inadvertently. Early in his career, he worked across different roles in construction, consulting, property leasing and corporate real estate services. He earned a civil engineering degree from Carleton University in Ottawa, Canada, and later an MBA with a concentration in Real Estate and Construction Management from the University of Denver. Before joining Google in 2006, he served as a senior vice president at the Trammell Crow Company, overseeing corporate accounts outside the U.S.

Radcliffe has been involved in CoreNet Global throughout his career, and that involvement has meant different things at different times. “Early on, it is really that Ivy League college. It’s the place where you go to find the best thinkers and educational courses, meet people and find jobs that might be available in the industry,” he says. As Radcliffe started to move into management positions, the next phase of his involvement focused on giving back. He served as a treasurer in the Rocky Mountain Chapter for a number of years, spoke at different forums and served on the global board. Later in his career, he took advantage of the opportunity to connect with a small subset of peers who faced similar situations and unique challenges of a Fortune 50 firm.

Radcliffe believes one of the keys to success is being willing to take chances and accept the consequences of failure. “So often in our industry people take the safe route. That is easy and it may keep you where you are, but it won’t necessarily set you up for future success,” he says. “You have to trust in yourself and sometimes make those difficult choices or provocative comments to move the innovation platform forward. I’ve been fortunate to be in situations like that throughout my career where I’ve spoken what I’ve believed. So, it is about taking those calculated risks.”

Although Radcliffe delayed his retirement due to the pandemic, he is officially stepping down this fall. After a career traveling the globe and logging a lot of airline miles, he is looking forward to having a much more local focus in the near term, spending time with his wife of 26 years and enjoying outdoor activities such as skiing, hiking and mountain biking. And he is very proud that his two children, one a recent college graduate and another graduating next year, are pursuing careers in sustainability.