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BBE Office Interiors rebrands for the new normal

3rd generation of problem solvers paves the way for change and expansion

PROVIDED PHOTO

New technology, like acoustic booths, offer new levels of privacy. ADA-compliant solutions ensure safety, functionality and style. Finishes from fabric, laminate metal and wood can all be customized to fit with new and existing furniture for a seamless fit into any environment. To learn more about the BBE Office Interiors, visit its website at bbeoffice.com, contact company president Dan Proskin at 413-442-8217 or email dan@bbeoffice.com.

PITTSFIELD — Since the end of World War II, the leadership of BBE Office Interiors has been making business decisions to align with market changes.

In 1945, its founder, the late William Pomerantz, began building the original printing, office and supply company into what it is today — office furniture and interior design. When Rob Proskin took over, he used innovative technology in the furniture design industry to implement cutting-edge business philosophies and practices. Now, Dan Proskin, Rob's son, is leading BBE through these changing times of major market disruption.

"COVID-19 turned the entire world upside down. As it begins to return to normal, BBE is once again molding the company to address the seismic shifts that have occurred," says Dan Proskin, company president.

PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE WITH ADAPTABLE SOLUTIONS

With the return to work, school and everyday life, BBE has the trained design and ergonomic specialists to guide clients in its three core markets — education, health care and corporate — to redesign, furnish and adapt their spaces for the new normal, post-pandemic.

"The number one priority in the education market is safety. BBE provides design practices for social distancing in the classroom, lounges, dorms and throughout campuses so students can safely return to school," says Proskin.

This requires modified seating plans with taller dividers and shields, as well as planning for safe traffic flow throughout spaces. BBE also considers this market's top priority — designing educational spaces for K-12, colleges and universities — to promote learning: functional, comfortable and ergonomically safe academic settings for students, faculty and administrators.

In the health care market, "clean equals safe," Proskin notes, and there's nothing more pressing these days than cleanability and sanitation.

"Another top priority for hospitals, cancer centers and private practice groups is to provide spaces that are warm and comfortable for the patient, to promote healing. BBE designs patient rooms that feel like the comfort of home, waiting areas that are welcoming and provide long term comfort and durability, as well as OR and ICU units that meet the highest safety standards."

Proskin says that having the right furniture made from the right materials is also key. Bleach-cleanable faux leathers and vinyl are popular solutions for seating products, as well as copper-infused mesh products, he notes. Copper acts as an antimicrobial agent, which naturally kills viruses and bacteria.

The corporate market will experience significant shifts, Proskin and other experts note. A McKinsey study from 2020 outlines the need for reconfiguration: A survey of 278 executives found that on average, they planned to reduce office space by 30 percent.

"This will require restructuring and reuse of what were big, open office spaces before the pandemic. Instead, we predict a move back to cubicles and dividers to accommodate social distancing," says Proskin. "Hoteling, a practice that offers employees everything they need to work, in a shared environment, when they don't have a workspace of their own, is also trending."

New technology and products in furniture design will play a big role in each of these distinct markets. For example, private acoustic booths impact the way we hear each other. Private workspaces change the way we see each other, ergonomically safe equipment changes our physical posture and workflow design changes will modify face to face communication and meetings.

A FOCUSED APPROACH TO GROWTH

BBE's market specialization addresses these complex shifting models for clients, says Proskin.

"Knowledge is king. The more my team knows about an industry segment, the more we can tailor solutions and products, and recommend new technology to meet their specific needs and primary goals. That's what's leading our growth strategy," Proskin says.

BBE is unique in its technology investment, ergonomic expertise and innovative design standards, and it has paid off. The company's superior reputation in the educational, health care and corporate arenas has helped it reach a broad base of clients in Berkshire County and beyond.

"Now we serve the Pioneer Valley with plans to expand throughout New England," Proskin adds.

BBE's growth is reflected in its current branding campaign, which includes the company's all new website and its renovated 28,000 square foot expanded showroom featuring a selection of state of the art office furnishings.

CHANGE OFFERS OPPORTUNITY

"COVID-19, shifting models, new technological advances: These are uncharted territories, but BBE has used market disruption as an opportunity to address new industry demands. And that's been going on for 75 years, three generations strong," notes Proskin.

BBE's turnkey solutions provide everything from design renderings and specification development to the right office furniture and ergonomic tools to meet design, productivity and workflow goals.

Projects are handled entirely by BBE end to end, from design through expert delivery and installation to ensure quality control. The company works through commercial, urban, industrial and green architectural and design firms, or clients can use the BBE expert design team directly.

BBE Office Interiors is family-owned and operated. To learn more about the company, visit its website at bbeoffice.com, contact Proskin at 413-442-8217 or email dan@bbeoffice.com.

Money

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"The last 12 months clearly have been an extraordinary challenge and learning experience," the company's CEO, Ronald Rittenmeyer, wrote in a filing with the Securities and Exchange Commission. In the same document, Tenet revealed that Rittenmeyer earned $16.7 million last year.

And L Brands, owner of Victoria's Secret, cut 15 percent of its office staff and temporarily closed most of its stores during the pandemic. Still, Andrew Meslow, who took over from Leslie H. Wexner as CEO in February 2020, earned $18.5 million.

"They always talk about how their employees are the most important assets," Minow said. "But, they sure don't treat them that way."

Dozens of public companies already have reported paying their CEOs $25 million or more last year, according to Equilar, an executive compensation consulting firm. Several companies that announced major layoffs last year, including Comcast and Nike, have not yet released executive compensation data for last year.

DEFENDING THE PLANS

Many companies defended their executive compensation plans. In some cases, CEOs took less than they were entitled to. Most top executives receive the bulk of their pay in shares, which might decrease in value and often vest over several years. And at many companies, the stock price was up despite the turbulence in the economy and regardless of whether the company was profitable.

"At the end of the day, CEOs end up getting rewarded for how they respond to these external occurrences," said Jannice Koors, a compensation consultant at Pearl Meyer who works with companies to determine executive pay. "If you think about stores closing, furloughs, etc., CEOs are getting rewarded for making those decisions."

In many ways, the role of corporate chieftains never has been more pronounced. Beyond running their businesses, CEOs have emerged as prominent voices in the national conversations around race, climate change and voting rights.

At the same time, they face critics on all sides. Sen. Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., recently told companies protesting Republican efforts to overhaul voting laws to "stay out of politics." Meanwhile, labor advocates are calling on companies to take better care of their workers.

The Highest-Paid Chief Executives Last Year

Company	C.E.O.	Compensation
Paycom	Chad Richison	$211.13 million
1Life Healthcare	Amir Dan Rubin	$199.05 million
T-Mobile	John Legere	$137.20 million
General Electric	Larry Culp	$73.19 million
Hilton	Chris Nassetta	$55.87 million
T-Mobile	Mike Sievert	$54.91 million
Formula One	Gregory Maffei	$47.12 million
Netflix	Reed Hastings	$43.23 million
Netlifx	Ted Sarandos	$39.32 million
ViacomCBS	Robert Bakish	$38.97 million
Charter Communications	Thomas Rutledge	$38.85 million
Chipotle	Brian Niccol	$38.04 million
Norwegian Cruise Line	Frank Del Rio	$36.38 million
MGM Resorts	James Murren	$36.18 million
Vivint Smart Home	Todd Petersen	$35.95 million
Prologis	Hamid Moghadam	$34.43 million
Ceridian HCM	David Ossip	$33.00 million
Zynga	Frank Gibeau	$32.00 million
JPMorgan Chase	Jamie Dimon	$31.66 million
Aptiv	Kevin Clark	$31.27 million

Note: Compensation is tallied from proxy filings as of late April. Includes salary, stock grants, bonuses and other benefits. John Legere and James Murren stepped down from their chief executive roles in 2020. Netflix has co-chief executives. | Source: Equilar

THE NEW YORK TIMES

While millions of people struggled to make ends meet, many of the companies hit hardest in 2020 showered their executives with riches.

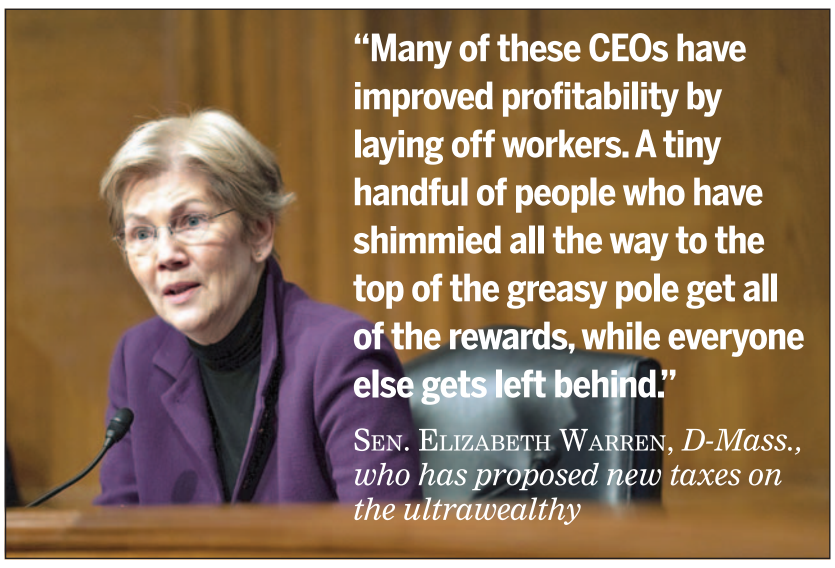
"It's time for the corporations in this nation to play their part in a recovery that can be shared by everybody," said Mary Kay Henry, international president of the Service Employees International Union. "We cannot reinforce the economic inequality that existed before the pandemic."

Executives at publicly traded companies receive most of their compensation in stock, an arrangement intended to align pay with the performance of a company's share price. When the stock price goes up, the theory goes, investors and executives alike share in the gains.

Defying logic, the stock market has been soaring for months now, more than making up the losses it suffered early in the pandemic. As a result, many CEOs ended the first year of the pandemic having overseen, improbably, a rise in their company's share price.

The resilience of the markets, and the sense that COVID-19 was an act of God, not the fault of any one person, helped companies justify big pay packages.

"Boards were thinking: 'This isn't our management team's fault. This isn't the result of bad planning or lax governance. This kind of happened to everybody,'" Koors said. "There was a sense in boardrooms that if, despite all this, they managed to deliver on the numbers, who are we to cut those payments in a year when everyone worked their butts off?"



ANNA MONEYMAKER

GUERIN BLASK — THE NEW YORK TIMES

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PUSHING BACK

Some investors and corporate governance groups are pushing back on executive compensation plans.

Starbucks shareholders voted in March against the compensation plans for the company's two top executives. The resolution was nonbinding, though, and the CEO, Kevin Johnson, received $14.7 million in cash and stock last year.

The biggest clash over pay this year is at General Electric, a company still reeling from years of mismanagement. Larry Culp, the CEO, received $73.2 million last year and could collect well over $100 million more, because of a recently updated pay plan. Several prominent corporate governance groups have come out in opposition to Culp's pay, and investors will vote on the issue at GE's annual meeting this month.

Even when executive pay was slashed, it often remained high. Robert A. Iger, chairman of the Walt Disney Co., last year earned less than half what he did in 2019, but his compensation still was $21 million. The pay cut was a reflection of his move from CEO to executive chairman, and of the difficult year at Disney, which laid off more than 28,000 people as its theme parks shut down.

At Boeing, Calhoun voluntarily gave up most of his cash salary this year, taking just $269,231 of the $1.4 million he was entitled to. Still, because of stock awards, his compensation was more than $21 million.

"Dave obviously gave up a lot," a Boeing spokesperson said in an email.

A Hilton spokesperson said the $55.9 million figure reported in the company's annual filing did not reflect Nassetta's actual pay. Because of the pandemic, Hilton restructured several complex stock awards. As a result, Nassetta's actual earnings for 2020 will be closer to $20.1 million, a slight decrease from 2019.

"2020 was an anomaly in so many ways," the spokesperson said in an email.