

CELEBRATING 10 YEARS OF SELFLESS SERVICE

In a competitive industry, commercial real estate firm Keyser finds success in serving others



By REBECCA L. RHOADES

Commercial real estate has a reputation for being a cut-throat business. The promise of high-dollar deals results in a competitive landscape where ambitious and often aggressive agents and brokers jockey mercilessly to make the most money for their clients and themselves.

It doesn't have to be that way, though, according to Jonathan Keyser.

As the founder and thought leader of

Keyser, a global commercial real estate firm that exclusively represents tenants in the office, industrial, semiconductor, healthcare and retail sectors, Jonathan has proven that success doesn't have to come at the expense of others.

"Commercial real estate tends to be a take-no-prisoners kind of environment," he says. "We've created a very different culture. For us, it's all about team and collaboration, helping each other and working together, which is very unusual in the CRE brokerage world."

SELFLESS SERVANT: Jonathan Keyser is the founder of KEYSER, a Scottsdale-based commercial real estate broker where ducks go flying — literally. Having rubber ducks around the office has provided a unique way to create an open culture with a business-driven, yet lighthearted environment.

In an industry where most businesses don't even make it to the 10-year mark, Keyser's positive outlook and selfless attitude have allowed it to thrive. In 2023, the company is celebrating its decennial

anniversary. It's been a decade filled with unprecedented market growth, an unexpected world health crisis, and a deep-seated belief that relationships built on trust and service results in long-term sustainable success.

A new leadership model

Business wasn't always this way for Jonathan. After growing up with Christian missionary parents, he was determined never to be poor. "I got into commercial real estate because I wanted to be rich; I wanted to do well," he recalls. "I became ruthless and rejected what my parents believed because that's what it took to succeed."

But the dog-eat-dog lifestyle took its toll. Jonathan speaks of an industry filled with daily battles between fellow brokers, phone calls made in cars in order to keep conversations secret, shortcuts that maximize profits, and a high burnout rate.

Then, while attending a conference,

Jonathan saw a presentation that changed his way of working — and his way of life.

"The speaker started talking about a different way of doing business, a way of succeeding while helping others succeed, too. I was fascinated," he recalls. "I thought, 'Is this even possible?' There's this idea that if you behave this way in a traditional CRE firm environment, you'll get trampled."

Jonathan reinvented his approach. "I had an epiphany that I'd been given the opportunity to show that you can love, serve, help and give — words that sound unfathomable in a CRE brokerage."

In 2013, Jonathan launched his eponymous firm and, with it, a company culture in which people selflessly help each other regardless of personal gain.

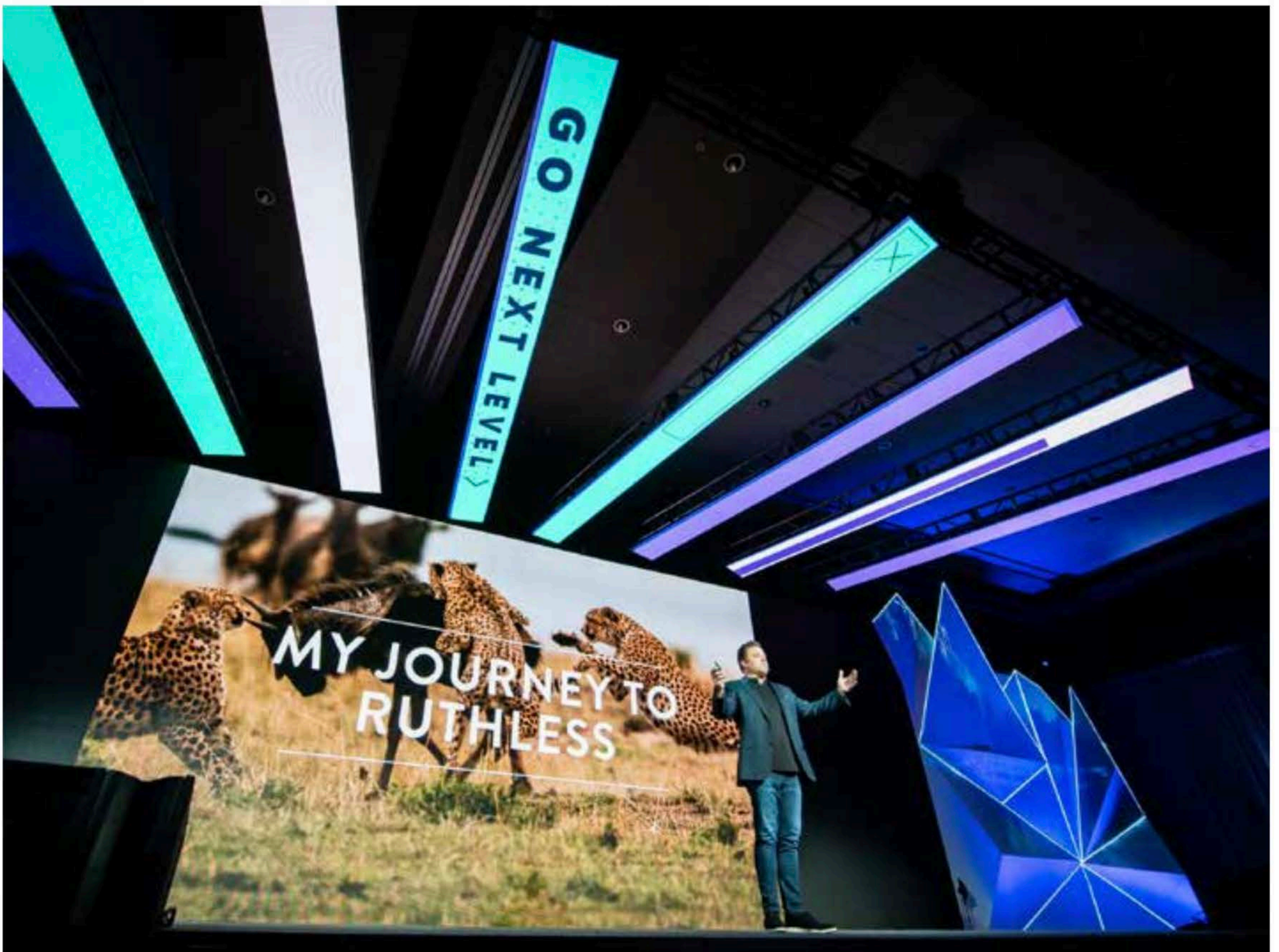
Core principles of business

Keyser operates under 15 core principles. From selflessly serving others

to outworking the competition, from functioning as a single team to following through on commitments — even to having fun — these credos are non-negotiable.

"A lot of people laughed," he says. "They used to call me the free community concierge. And I leaned in. That's exactly what I am. If somebody reaches out to me and I have the capacity to help them, I'm going to do so."

THOUGHT LEADER: Jonathan Keyser was a speaker at NextCon, which brings together the brightest business minds to demonstrate proven tools and best practices for growing your business. Keyser is an author, thought leader, and guest speaker on disruptive and service-oriented business practices. He is also the author of "You Don't Have to Be Ruthless to Win: A Leader's Guide to Succeeding in Business with Badass Selfless Service."



KEYSER 10TH ANNIVERSARY

“Part of the challenge with selfless leadership is that it often has too many religious undertones or it comes with the notion that you’re easily trappable,” he continues. “I’m not soft, I’m not weak, I’m not a pushover. I’m not someone you want to mess with. But at the same time, I’m committed to selflessly serving those around me.”

In just 10 years, Jonathan grew the business from a small boutique brokerage to one with state and national recognition and numerous awards. He’s often asked to speak about this work model at conferences and corporate gatherings. And a book he wrote that details his strategy, “You Don’t Have to Be Ruthless to Win,” hit No. 1 on the Wall Street Journal’s bestseller list.

Keyser 2.0

Like many companies, Keyser used the pandemic to reinvent itself.

Jonathan recalls, “We asked ourselves, ‘What have we learned over the past 10 years that we can then take and improve upon?’”

The first step was to create a more cohesive and focused team. “When you go through a pandemic, it applies pressure, and you can see what comes out the sides. And we saw some stuff that wasn’t aligned with our vision,” Jonathan states. “We want people who are the right fit — who are going to be part of our culture, who are going to be collaborative, who are going to lean in and be selfless, who are willing to love and serve people in the community, and who will go above and beyond for their clients.”

Second, the company has invested heavily in technology. “We’ve invested a ton in technology that’s really going to streamline what our brokers can do,” Jonathan continues. The hiring of a significant amount of support enhances the firm’s capabilities. “The goal of our vision is for the brokers to only do what brokers should be doing and having support help them,” Jonathan continues. “All we have is time, and this allows them to double the service they can provide to the clients.”

Finally, Keyser is bringing these elements together in a new headquarters. Previously, the company was located at Indian School and Scottsdale roads. The new office space, which is currently

under construction at the mixed-use Scottsdale Entrada campus at 64th Street and McDowell Road, is scheduled to open around May.

“A lot of the seeds of service that we planted 10 years ago have really started to come into fruition. We’re busier now than we’ve ever been. We’re having record quarters. And we’re doing it with the vision of continuing to grow — but in a careful, thoughtful way,” Jonathan says. “I don’t want to be the biggest, I want to be the best.”

He concludes, “I’ve never been more excited about the company than I am today. I’m grateful to the community for getting us here. And I’m excited for the future, because I feel like we’re just getting started.” **AB**

GIVING BACK: Keyser operates under 15 core principles — from selflessly serving others to outworking the competition.



KEYSER:

10 years in commercial real estate

2013

With enough commercial real estate experience and the tenacity to venture out on their own, Jonathan Keyser and co-founders Darius Green and Ian Davie founded Keyser in 2013. The company was designed to be a new kind of commercial real estate brokerage. Based on 15 Core Operating Principles, Keyser would be a true tenant-only, conflict-free firm that acted as an advocate for its client's best interests with the mission of changing the business world through selfless service.

2014

Keyser and 15 other tenant-only brokerage firms banded together to create Exis Global, which has grown to become the largest independent tenant rep organization in the world with more than 570 brokers worldwide. Exis offers tenants international support and allows each founding firm to co-broker with a local expert, giving tenants the ability to expand globally and experience consistent tenant-only brokerage representation.

2015-2018

During these formative years, Keyser focused on building its team, its processes, its award-winning culture, and the Keyser Way — how clients would experience Keyser. Because of its disruptive culture and service excellent, Keyser was named to Az Business magazine's "Most Creative Companies" and "Most Admired Companies," was honored as a "Best Place to Work" by Phoenix Business Journal, and was named a "PowerBroker" by Costar.

2019

Jonathan Keyser published "You Don't Have to Be Ruthless to Win," a Wall Street Journal No. 1

Bestseller Book about Keyser's culture and how business leaders can implement a selfless service strategy in their own companies and see unparalleled success. Jonathan was invited to join Forbes Real Estate Council and contribute to leading business publications such as Fast Company, Inc., Forbes, The Business Journal and others. In addition, he became a notable keynote speaker, podcast guest and thought leader nationally.

2020

During the start of the pandemic, Keyser leveraged its selfless service business model and negotiating expertise to help tenants find rental relief so they could stay afloat in challenging times. Because of Keyser's efforts, the firm was recognized as "The Commercial Real Estate Disruptor" by USA Today. Additionally, Keyser was named an Inc. 5000 winner, a Phoenix Business Journal "Best Place to Work" and a Top Franchise Supplier by Entrepreneur magazine.

2021

Keyser adopted a hybrid workplace model and helped business leaders navigate their commercial real estate needs and lease agreements in the new working normal. During this year, Keyser was named "The Best Commercial Real Estate Advisory Firm" and "Commercial Property Marketing Innovator of the Year (Arizona)" by Build Magazine, a "Top 50 Most Trustworthy Company" by The Silicon Review and a "Top Franchise Supplier" by Entrepreneur magazine.

2022

Jonathan Keyser was named a "Champion of Change," "Az Business Leader of 2022" and "Person to Know" by AZ Big Media.

2023

Keyser celebrates a decade of innovative, tenant-only representation with a new brand experience, new headquarters and the same dedication to selflessly serving the Keyser community and tenants globally.

