Very few businesses of any kind last more than a hundred years. In commercial real estate, where https://marcobhuz653.moderncairn.com/posts/building-systems-every-property-manager-should-monitor fortunes rise and fall with market cycles, longevity is even rarer. A brokerage that has kept its doors open since 1904 offers a useful case study in leadership, and the lessons apply well beyond the walls of any commercial real estate headquarters Southern California firms maintain.

DAUM Commercial Real Estate Services traces its roots to W.H. Daum, who founded Los Angeles' first commercial real estate brokerage firm. Today the firm operates from a commercial real estate headquarters in Southern California with offices across the region and in Phoenix. What can leaders in any industry learn from an organization that has adapted for more than a century?

Lesson One: Adaptation Is a Leadership Responsibility

The Los Angeles of 1904 bears little resemblance to the region today. Businesses that survive that kind of change do so because leadership keeps adjusting the organization to the world around it. In commercial real estate, that has meant expanding into new property types, opening offices as the region spread outward, and adopting new tools for research and marketing.

The role of a chief executive officer includes setting direction and allocating resources, but in a long-lived firm it also includes deciding what to change and what to preserve. Leaders who cling to old methods risk irrelevance. Leaders who change everything risk losing the culture that made the organization successful.

Lesson Two: Culture Outlasts Any Single Market

Markets come and go. What carries a firm through difficult periods is a shared sense of how people treat clients and each other. In brokerage, that often means a commitment to honest advice, responsiveness and long-term relationships over short-term wins.

Leaders build that culture through daily choices:

- Recognizing professionals who put client interests first
- Mentoring newer team members and passing down market knowledge
- Communicating openly during downturns rather than avoiding hard news
- Holding everyone, including top producers, to the same ethical standards

Lesson Three: A Commercial Real Estate Headquarters Southern California Offices Can Lean On

Southern California is not one market but many, from coastal office districts to inland logistics corridors. A brokerage serving the whole region needs local experts who know their submarkets intimately. At the same time, those experts benefit from shared research, marketing, accounting and technology.

This balance is harder than it sounds. Too much central control slows local teams down and frustrates clients who expect quick answers. Too little support leaves each office reinventing its own systems for research, marketing and accounting. The firms that get it right usually standardize the back office while leaving pricing judgment, client strategy and relationship building in the hands of the people closest to the market.

The leadership lesson is to give local teams authority while providing strong central support. A commercial real estate headquarters Southern California firms rely on should function less as a command center and more as a service center that makes every office more effective.

Lesson Four: Take the Long View on Relationships

A firm that has helped bring more than 6,500 companies into the Los Angeles market has seen how relationships compound over time. A tenant who receives good advice on a small lease may return years later with a much larger requirement. A landlord who trusts a firm with one building may later hand over a portfolio.

Leaders reinforce this by measuring success over years, not only quarters, by rewarding candid advice even when it delays a deal, and by encouraging professionals to stay in touch with clients between transactions.

Lesson Five: Prepare for Cycles Before They Arrive

Every leader of a long-lived brokerage has guided the firm through recessions. The ones who handled them best usually prepared in advance by managing expenses carefully during good years, diversifying service lines, and keeping talented people engaged when transaction volume slowed.

Practical preparation includes:

1. Building recurring revenue through services such as property management and consulting
2. Maintaining expertise across several property types
3. Investing in market research so the firm can advise clients through uncertainty
4. Keeping communication honest with both clients and staff

Frequently Asked Questions

When was DAUM founded?

W.H. Daum founded the firm in 1904, establishing Los Angeles' first commercial real estate brokerage.

Who leads DAUM today?

Michael Nubel serves as President and CEO of DAUM Commercial Real Estate Services.

What can non-real estate leaders learn from long-lived brokerages?

The most transferable lessons involve adapting to change while preserving culture, balancing local autonomy with central support, investing in relationships and preparing for downturns before they arrive.

Longevity in business is never an accident. It reflects generations of leaders making thoughtful choices about change, culture and relationships. For anyone guiding an organization through an uncertain market, the experience of a century-old brokerage offers a steady reminder that durable success is built one decision at a time.