

A Culture Defined by Healthy Operations



Mark Minasian
CEO and Co-Founder

A Q&A with Mark Minasian, CEO and Co-Founder of KBS on the Company's Response to the COVID Crisis

Throughout the COVID-19 crisis KBS has worked closely with clients to keep their operations safe. We spoke with Mark Minasian, CEO and Co-Founder of KBS, about the strategy and culture that positions KBS as an essential partner throughout this crisis and into the future.

How did KBS work with clients to keep their operations safe during the crisis?

The crisis unfolded very quickly and keeping our people and clients safe was our primary focus. During the first week of March (2020) we started to see the massive societal impact the crisis brought, and along with it an unimaginable dislocation and real time reformation of our business. Thousands of our client locations closed overnight on one hand, while those in essential sectors had massive, urgent needs to keep operations up and running.

We provide essential cleaning, disinfection, and building hygiene operations at large scale to many of the most recognizable names in logistics and distribution, grocery, mass merchant, pharmacy, and technology sectors. To stay operational, our clients needed enhanced cleaning and disinfecting teams working at increased frequencies to stay in step with the exponential volumes they were experiencing, including scaled responses to acute COVID outbreaks.

In other words, they needed a plan and a team to help maintain healthy operations during a rapidly evolving emergency.


How did KBS respond to emerging client demands throughout the crisis?

This sudden and urgent demand was happening across tens of thousands of customers' sites all over the country, giving rise to new challenges around ensuring our workers' safety, sourcing effective cleaning chemicals and supplies, and providing essential PPE (personal protective equipment).


In one case, we were tasked with the mission of beginning service at 9,000 pharmacy locations for touch point disinfection cleaning within one week. We literally air freighted in disinfectants, PPE, and materials as we assembled our teams and routes. That was one of many, many virus intervention programs we were tasked with by our clients. We've received amazing feedback from clients thanking us for our professionalism and resourcefulness during the crisis. I will say we are very grateful for the opportunity to be on the front lines with our clients, and we are inspired by the grit, resourcefulness, and commitment of our team.

How did KBS pivot during the early stages of the crisis?

We had to completely rethink and redeploy our service delivery architecture in real time. What I mean by that is, prior to the pandemic we were operationally organized around conventional industry verticals: retail, logistics, business and industry, and hospitality. When the pandemic hit, it had vastly disproportionate impacts on those verticals. Our hospitality business was devastated on one hand, while essential retail and logistics had demand at never-before-seen levels. We immediately eliminated the distinction between verticals, stood up cross-functional task forces across the country, and embedded support services like IT, HR, Finance and Compliance into those task forces. This helped create teams that were agile, nearly autonomous, and completely mission focused. We went from dealing with a known operating tempo with somewhat predictable pacing, to an amorphous, dynamic operating environment. Yet, within a couple of weeks we had our bearing. The interoperability of the cross functional teams was remarkable and our leaders from the field to the support services were outstanding. We had bumps along the way, but quickly started standing up newly scaled operations, redeploying thousands of workers sidelined in hospitality and responding to urgent client requirements. This challenge was organizational. We had to have an operating posture that met the unimaginable demand peaks and valleys, while keeping our people and clients safe.



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What are other challenges to which KBS effectively responded?

Our additional challenge was the supply chain. Prior to the pandemic we were lulled into the group think of a “lean, just-in-time” mindset. We had about 30 days of materials on hand at any given time. I regret that and we had to fight our way out of a deep hole because of it. Just-in-time worked great until it didn’t. When the pandemic spread, our industry supply chains flat out broke down and the materials we had on hand were consumed in a flash. Meanwhile, our major distribution, retail, and pharmacy clients were depending on us to not only deliver trained and equipped technicians to clean and disinfect every day, they also needed us to deliver essential materials including toilet paper, hand towels, soaps, disinfectants, and PPE. Our suppliers in most instances were simply overrun.

We responded quickly to this challenge. Within days, we opened major warehouses in strategic locations around the country, leased freight trucks, went directly to supply manufacture facilities around the country, trucked product to our warehouses, and shipped from there. Beyond that, we paid for air freight to deliver chemicals and disinfectant cleaners.

How did KBS protect its employees during this critical time?

PPE was in critically short supply as everyone remembers, but we were very clear: we wouldn't send anybody to work without proper PPE. We had to scramble to secure supplies, and it was through decentralized, yet aligned decision-making, along with the ingenuity and grit of our field leaders that ensured our people didn't go without protection. We sourced PPE from around the globe, avoiding scam artists and profiteers in the process. Within a couple of weeks, we partnered with a Los Angeles based fashion company and began sewing our first 75,000 reusable, washable masks. Those masks were sent in packages to every workers' home. Today, the supply chain is at a more stable place, with plenty of gloves, masks, glasses, and protective suits, but "just-in-time" global supply chains are yesterday's news as far as we are concerned. Going forward, we will always maintain strategic reserves of those mission critical elements to maintain healthy operations at scale for future challenges. North American first. If we can truck it, we can get it.

Why was KBS able to adapt and respond so quickly throughout the crisis?

We deployed cleaning and disinfecting services across approximately 75,000 thousand sites nationwide and performed over 250,000 COVID deep cleanings. From the neighborhood pharmacy and grocery store to the logistics and distribution companies that get things to our front doors – we kept facilities healthy and delivered environments that helped customers and employees stay safe. We did the job for our customers and did our part for our society. All the while, we never wavered from our core values and culture; in fact, our culture carried us.

What is different about KBS that allowed the company to move at the scale you spoke about?


It comes down to our culture and the core mindsets and behaviors we value most including integrity, a bias for action, straight talk, and leading from the front. These deeply ingrained cultural attributes and behavioral norms allowed us to pivot. More tactically, that culture gets to a place that we call "C double A." Culture. Alignment. Autonomy. That means that we ensure our leaders around the country buy into our culture and embody it. Then, we make sure that they are aligned on the operational and economic outcomes we care about. From there, we provide them the autonomy to make timely decisions at their respective levels. Culture. Strategic Alignment. Tactical Autonomy.

Part of a binding culture is shared experience. Our culture has become even more ingrained and is more evident today, as the bonds among the team have become even stronger. KBS teams worked around the clock every single day, showing incredible organizational and individual dedication and sacrifice. This was seen again and again, in a way that we couldn't plan for, we can only set the tone, example and direction for it, and we can celebrate it, bolster it and feed it. Culture carried us through the first 35 years and through the first wave of the pandemic. It will carry us through future challenges so long as we stay true to it.


KBS has thousands of team members working in the field. How does the KBS culture translate to all of the KBS team that has served on the front lines of this fight?

Our culture has been evolving for decades. It starts with a belief that all work is honorable, and we acknowledge the dignity of those who do it. Dignity is different than respect. I have to earn your respect and you have to earn mine. But dignity is the inherent, God given value in each of us. Dignity is powerful. A workforce centered on it can do great things and respond to any challenge.

Going out in to the field the first week of April, looking in to the eyes of a young zone manager as she and a team were about to go in to do a COVID cleaning, and seeing both uncertainty and resolve in her eyes is imprinted in my mind. What is in front of us is uncertain. What is certain is that our customers can always count on KBS to get the job done safely and done well, because at KBS we honor the work and acknowledge the dignity of those who do it. We are with them, and together and there is no limit to what we can achieve.



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How does KBS’s experience throughout this crisis inform working with clients as they begin to reopen their facilities?

As I mentioned earlier, we serve a diverse set of clients in different industries, so the work that we performed in logistics and distribution has relevant learnings that are portable as we help open retail environments. Similarly, the work we performed for grocery clients can help with hotels and restaurants. What we learned from touch-point disinfecting, supply chain re-engineering, disinfectant validation, to recruiting and deploying teams –is hard-won knowledge that KBS will apply to businesses as they reopen and prepare to operate in this new environment.

Our truly agile, dignity-based culture means that divisions aren’t working in silos, but are sharing ideas and best practices with each other. The level of experience we gained early in the crisis will serve our clients well as together we move into the next phase of our new operating reality. Keeping operations healthy, reacting to current needs and anticipating new ones, we’re working hard every day to stay ahead of the curve and we’ll be there when our clients need us.



What do you think it takes for customers and employees to feel safe to return to business?

The scope and frequency of cleaning and disinfecting is more important than ever. Beyond that, I think clients will look for clear validation of those efforts. They will ask questions like: What kinds of disinfectants are being used? What kinds of techniques are being employed during the cleaning process? How often are touch points being cleaned? How do I know the cleaning and disinfecting is truly effective?

For example, we use scanners that measure bio film concentrations on a surface before and after it is cleaned. Using these devices, we're able to confirm the effectiveness of cleaning and disinfecting procedures, measuring the microbial load pre and post intervention. We're also working with clients to communicate with their customers and employees what chemicals and techniques are being applied to provide added assurances.

For customers and employees to feel safe, they need to know that the environment they're entering is truly a healthy operation and is being professionally serviced. The right people, the right products, the right training, the right oversight, the right disinfectant dwell time, the right validation. It all matters. Clients play an important role in the co-production of good service, especially during the "between cleans," by ensuring wipes, sanitizers, and distancing are utilized. That, coupled with a professional cleaning firm disinfecting the right way and validating those efforts is fundamental to reopening and returning to business.

About KBS

Kellermeyer Bergensons Services, LLC ("KBS"), is a trusted partner to leading operations and facility managers across 75,000 client locations throughout North America. We provide essential facility services that keep businesses operating healthy with scalable solutions customized to meet specific requirements.

Our expertise and technology enable our clients to anticipate issues, ensure quality, and maximize efficiency. With decades of deep experience in cleaning, including being on the front lines throughout the COVID-19 crisis, KBS is committed to partnering with clients to Stay Ahead of the Curve™ with the latest advances for maintaining healthy operations.

For more information, visit www.kbs-services.com.