

# Bios for 2017 Distinguished Alumni Panel

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## **Michele Conn '03 | President and Founder, Conn Strategy Group**



Michele Conn is President and Founder of Conn Strategy Group, LLC (CSG). Michele has 20+ years of experience working with growing technology companies across multiple categories including real estate, retail, local entertainment, career search and automotive.

Michele was previously Principal at Moderne Ventures, an early stage Venture Fund and Accelerator program focused on technology companies that are innovating within real estate, finance, insurance and home services. Michele worked closely with portfolio companies on all aspects of launching and growing within Moderne's target industries – including product, pricing, pitch and determining customer targets.

Prior to joining Moderne, Michele was Vice President of Corporate Development for Move, Inc. (formerly NASDAQ: MOVE and acquired by News Corp), parent company to one of the world's largest real estate portals, [realtor.com](http://realtor.com)® and a leading developer of real estate sales and marketing software. During her six-year tenure with Move, Michele led more than \$55M of acquisitions in the real estate category, including ListHub, TigerLead and FiveStreet and created revenue, profit and audience growth through strategic initiatives and partnerships.

Prior to Move, Michele spent ten years at Tribune Company. During that time, Michele's role expanded from finance to business development where she conceived and executed on new products and strategies through partnerships, licensing, joint ventures and internal product development for Tribune Interactive, Tribune Company's \$250M internet business operating 40+ newspaper, television and niche websites and invested in properties such as CareerBuilder.com, Apartments.com, HomeFinder.com, ShopLocal.com and [metromix.com](http://metromix.com). Michele began her career in public accounting.

She holds an MBA from Northwestern's Kellogg School of Management and a Bachelor's degree in accounting from Indiana University.

## **Badal Shah '12 | CEO, Turbo Appeal**



Badal Shah studied Computer Informatics and Business as an undergraduate at Indiana University in Bloomington. For 10 years Badal owned and operated a multi-national speciality chemicals manufacturing and distribution business. Under Badal's leadership the chemicals business expanded to 1000 product SKU's across 33 countries globally, with joint venture manufacturing in the U.S., India, and China. Badal is a tenacious, sales-driven leader, with a highly competitive will to win. Badal taught himself two languages in order to compete in certain international markets, both of which he is now fluent in.

While growing the business Badal earned his M.B.A. in Entrepreneurship and Marketing from the Kellogg School of Management at Northwestern University. In 2013 at approximately \$50MM in revenue, Badal decided to exit the business and leverage his technology background to explore new opportunities. Badal is currently the co-founder and CEO of TurboAppeal, a software company that has developed first to market technology for the commercial and residential real estate markets. The software streamlines the property tax appeal process while leveraging big data analytics to power real estate valuation tools. TurboAppeal has generated more appeals nationally than any other tax appeal company in the industry. A venture backed technology company, TurboAppeal has raised \$7.2MM to date to support its quick national expansion.

Badal is a passionate entrepreneur that gravitates towards opportunities that impact society in a positive manner, thus enabling him to teach his own kids (ages 4 and 6) about always doing the right thing.

## **Mike Travalini '09 | President-Residential, SMS Assist**

Mike Travalini is the President of the Residential Division of SMS Assist, a Chicago-based technology company that provides multisite property management services for institutional real estate clients using its proprietary software platform and national network of affiliates. The Residential Division manages all property maintenance logistics from inception to completion in the rapidly growing single family rental market.



Prior to joining SMS Assist, Mike was Senior Vice President of Operations for Starwood Waypoint Residential Trust, which merged with Colony American Homes in January 2016 to form Colony Starwood Homes, the third-largest single family rental REIT with more than 30,000 homes. In his time with the company, Mike oversaw portfolio repairs and maintenance operations and led the company's new market expansion efforts

nationally. Mike was previously Director of Acquisitions at the Laramar Group, an owner and operator of more than 40,000 apartment units. Mike began his career as an auditor within the real estate practice group at Ernst & Young, LLP.

Mike earned his MBA from the Kellogg School of Management with concentrations in Real Estate and Finance. He earned his bachelor's degree in accounting from Boston College and is a CPA. He serves on the leadership teams of the Kellogg Real Estate Alumni Club (KREAC) and the Chicago Real Estate Private Equity Group (CREPE).

### **Benjamin J. Weprin '10 | CEO, AJ Capital Partners**



Ben Weprin is the founder and CEO of Adventurous Journeys Capital Partners based in Chicago, Illinois. Founded in 2008, AJ Capital Partners is a dynamic organization of counter-culture hospitality and real estate investors with the collective goals of acquiring, repositioning and developing highly sought-after hospitality assets and prestigious resort destinations throughout the United States, Mexico, and the Caribbean. In 2014, Mr. Weprin launched the Graduate Hotels brand – a hotel collection targeting university towns across the country that celebrates each town's local culture and history.

AJ Capital Partners' operating portfolio includes Malliouhana Hotel & Spa in Anguilla, Calistoga Ranch in Napa Valley, The Pontchartrain in New Orleans, Thompson Nashville, Thompson Chicago, the Chicago Athletic Association, Soho House Chicago and the Graduate Hotels portfolio, among others.

Mr. Weprin is a graduate of the University of Tennessee and holds a MBA from Northwestern University's Kellogg School of Management. He also serves on the board of directors of Auberge Resorts.