



**Rob Sobelman**

**Student, Class of 2004**

**Interviewed by Tylor Frank  
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*Robert Sobelman attended Staples High School and graduated in 2004. Rob was involved in several organizations at Staples, and his senior year was president of both the Student Assembly and the Key Club. He later graduated from Colgate University in 2008 and from Brooklyn Law School in 2012. Today he is a law clerk for a federal judge.*

***In what class were you when you heard the news, and how did that news come to you?***

I was a sophomore in a U.S. History and English collaborative class. It was a double period (periods 2 and 3) with Ms. Boland and Mr. Chiappetta, in the so-called “lower 9 building.” I remember there were people talking and frantically moving around in the hallways. I cannot remember if someone peeked their head in, or if someone peeked their head out, but in any event, someone said that a plane crashed into the World Trade Center. No one could believe what they heard. We initially thought it was a freak accident, but then a second plane hit and everyone then realized something bigger was going on. I remember the class kind of broke down and people just wanted to get information, but it was difficult to do so. It makes me feel old to say it, but many students did not have cell phones, although I did. Though my cell phone was advanced as it got at the time -- it had no internet.

***What was your reaction towards the decision to shut down the internet/computers?***

It was upsetting to be cut off from that flow of information. I think Dr. Rakovic, the principal at the time, made an error in judgment. Though I understand that she was concerned that students whose parents worked in Manhattan might be scared by pictures or video of the attacks, the lack of information ultimately made everyone more afraid. As an alternative, I remember using a then-new technology called GOOG411, an over-the-phone Google news service. You would call it, and it would lead you through a voice prompt. If you asked for “latest news,” it would read you the news. I remember calling it over and over throughout the day trying to learn what was going on. The immediate scale of the issue was not apparent.

***Before 9/11 did you receive any education about terrorism?***

I don't think so. The only thing I remember about terrorism is the movie *The Siege*, which was oddly on point. I later learned that it was written by Lawrence Wright, an expert on terrorism

who more recently authored a book about 9/11 and Al Qaeda titled *The Looming Tower*. That movie, at the time, was the only thing I knew about terrorism.

*Were you part of any organization during 9/11?*

During my sophomore year I was a member of Student Assembly and secretary of the Key Club. I do not recall if Student Assembly did anything related to 9/11, but I do remember working with the Key Club and a classmate, Aaron Eisman, to design, produce and sell hundreds of “Gone But Never Forgotten” t-shirts to benefit a national foundation for victims of 9/11 founded by former Presidents George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton.