

Mr. Wexner, an up-and-coming retail magnate from Ohio, became his key client. Mr. Wexner's company controlled the chains Abercrombie & Fitch, The Limited, Express and Victoria's Secret, and his wealth would eventually grow to more than \$7 billion, by a Forbes estimate. Mr. Epstein managed his money.

For almost a decade, Mr. Epstein co-managed up to 7% of the retail company's stock through trusts he controlled, federal filings show. Working in an office in Midtown Manhattan with 10 to 15 lawyers, accountants and administrative staff, Mr. Epstein helped with the apparel mogul's taxes, managed his stock investments and ran his charities and trusts. He also became president of a company Mr. Wexner set up to develop the town where he lives near Columbus, Ohio, a business document shows.

In 1991, Mr. Wexner granted Mr. Epstein authority to borrow money, pay expenses, sign contracts and handle other financial dealings on his behalf, according to power-of-attorney documents filed in Franklin County, Ohio. "He had absolute control" of Mr. Wexner's wealth, one person said.

Mr. Epstein drafted the prenuptial agreement between Mr. Wexner and his wife, Abigail, according to people familiar with the matter. The retail company sold Mr. Epstein a Boeing 727, and Mr. Wexner sold him his large Upper East Side Manhattan townhouse, which law-enforcement agents raided this month.

When Mr. Wexner did deals for assets such as real estate, Mr. Epstein would take a cut, said one of the people. As Mr. Wexner's personal money manager, Mr. Epstein received a percentage of investment gains, totaling millions of dollars annually.

In a companywide email this month, Mr. Wexner said he wasn't aware of Mr. Epstein's alleged behavior with women and said he had severed ties with Mr. Epstein nearly 12 years ago. "I would not have continued to work with any individual capable of such egregious, sickening behavior as has been reported about him," he said.

On Wednesday, Mr. Wexner's L Brands Inc. said its board hired a law firm to conduct a review of Mr. Epstein's role. "We do not believe he was ever employed by nor served as an authorized representative of the company," an L Brands spokeswoman said.

Mr. Epstein's association with Mr. Wexner gave him legitimacy as a money manager for the wealthy, and he began handling the portfolio of Elizabeth Ross Johnson, the heiress of the Johnson & Johnson fortune. Ms. Johnson, known as Libet, was a tabloid fixture in New York with five husbands and years of family drama.

Once again, the relationship went beyond money management—Mr. Epstein's name appears briefly on property records for Ms. Johnson's home in Vail and several land parcels in Dutchess County, N.Y., north of New York City.

Ms. Johnson died in 2017. A spokesman for the Johnson family declined to comment.

Around 1995, Mr. Epstein brought his staff to meet with Apollo Global Management LLC, a private-equity firm run by Leon Black, to pitch his company as an ideal service for Apollo's wealthy clients, including tax strategy. "He found every single provision that could justifiably be utilized, and he worked with some very smart tax lawyers," said a person who attended the meeting.

Tax work can be especially lucrative because the savings can be huge. And since clients don't want extra scrutiny of their taxes, the strategies often remain under the radar.