

LUNCH BREAK

with Izzy (Sruly) Green



BACKGROUND: Izzy (Sruly) Green is the co-founder of Evergreen Insurance and Risk Management, a Monsey-based insurance company that focuses on real estate investment. Starting in his partner's brother's garage as a two-man team, he and his partner and best friend Sol Eisenberg have expanded Evergreen into a multi-staffed team, servicing over 1,000 clients and insuring properties across 15 states. A proud Skvere *chasid*, Izzy embodies the entrepreneurial spirit, having persevered to create a successful business out of literally nothing. His mantra for himself and those seeking his guidance is that with Hashem's help everything is possible. There is no excuse not to try hard to succeed.

AGE: 26

COMPANY:
Evergreen Insurance and Risk Management

EMPLOYEES: 11

ESTABLISHED:
2009

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I grew up in Monsey and went to *yeshivah* in New Square. I got married at 19 years old in 2007 and although I consider myself an *ehrliche* person, I realized that learning full time wasn't for me, so I sought a job. I still have daily *shiurim*, but I see myself as a *Zevulun*. In 2008, I got a job as a foreman (manager) for a company that installed drywall. I worked there for a year but when the real estate bubble burst, I was laid off.

At first I tried anything; I drove for a car service and I tried photography. One day, I had a question about my car insurance bill and went to speak to my broker. By the time I left, I was hired as a salesman. I had no job,

so I figured I had nothing to lose. But with no potential for growth in that company, I decided to jump in on my own. Although I had no experience and not much of a secular education, I liked the industry. I called my best friend Sol (Shloimy) Eisenberg who was working at a marketing company at the time. We drove around the block a few times discussing the idea and that is how Evergreen Insurance was born.”

LIVES:
Chestnut Ridge, NY

BUSINESS:
Monsey, NY

CURRENT STATS:
Insures 15,000 residential units, 10 million square feet of commercial property, 1,000 clients

Why an insurance agency?

I like the concept of residuals. In real estate or in most businesses, when you make a sale, it ends there. When you are an insurance broker, you receive a residual for the length of time that the client continues his relationship with you. It might not be that much at first, but the security of repeat income drew us to insurance.

The name Evergreen—where did that come from?

First of all, it has nothing to do with my last name, Green. We were looking for a name, and since trees are often associated with protection we chose the name Evergreen. Evergreen trees are covered all year round with foliage, so we thought that was appropriate for our insurance business, which provides year-round coverage.

INSURES:
Over 1 billion dollars in property coverage, 1.5 billion liability coverage

Did it go well right away?

No. It was a disaster.

Why?

We had no financial backing and no support from anyone. At first we thought we'd place a few ads and wait for the calls to come; they didn't. We didn't call people we knew, as we didn't want to "hit up" people we knew. After a few months of getting nowhere we tried something new. Every morning, we drove down to Manhattan and canvassed the buildings. We took down the information of who was in charge of the building's insurance, who was the manager and so on. After we compiled a large list, we began cold calling: "Hi, we can save you money on your insurance..." After we were hung up on, we went down to their offices—literally knocking on doors. For more than a year we made no money at all.

What was your first break?

After about six months, an elderly gentleman said to us, "My insurance is about to expire, my broker is working on it, but you can give me a quote as well." We jumped for joy—someone was finally speaking to us! We ended up saving him 40% in insurance costs and to this day he is one of our big clients. Slowly but surely, we built ourselves up. After our trying experience my partner Sol likes to say, "If you want to make money overnight, work the night shift."

What do you believe gives you the edge in your business?

Because we focus solely on commercial/investment real estate insurance, nothing else. There are hundreds of insurance underwriters out there and since we specialize in real estate, we know exactly which underwriter is the best match for a particular building.

What was the worst business decision you ever made?

Trying to do too much. Today, we only sell real estate insurance, but when we started we sold everything from car insurance to single homeowners' insurance. We realized we couldn't do it all and we decided to focus entirely on commercial real estate insurance. Making the sale is harder, but the monetary reward is larger.

Who do you target for more business?

Almost all of our business is from recommendations; however, I can tell you whom we do not target: friends and family. Our client base isn't Jewish. It's generally people with whom we have not had any previous relationship. It simply lets us breathe more easily around family and friends.

Wait a minute—your partner Sol Eisenberg is your best friend!

That's a great point. We both decided our friendship is the only risk we were willing to take and no more. With Hashem's help, we have a great relationship and we refer to each other as friends first and partners second.

The first thing you do when you come to work?

In our company, we promote having an empty Inbox. After you deal with an email, archive it. Email shouldn't be used as a means of following up. We use in-house software to follow up with clients and accounts. I'm a big believer in software customization. I designed our software myself. I designed our original website too. You can learn anything you need to learn.

How do you manage your to-do list?

I use our company software to follow up on in-house stuff. I also use the notepad on my phone. I don't set alarm reminders as they can set you back. You can snooze it or dismiss it and it never gets done. This way, I constantly look at my to-do list and



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Izzy (Sruly) Green and his partner and best friend Sol Eisenberg



get things done. For things I need to get done around the house, my wife is my best reminder.

What's the best business advice you ever received?

My father advised me before I went into business:

“Always talk to someone who went down this road before you. He will know what’s involved, what’s not involved, and if it’s worth doing or not.” My father had a friend in Lakewood, a successful businessman, and Sol and I used to talk to him about our business ideas. We thought of crazy ideas, from picture-developing kiosks to a barbershop to a wedding hall. He would pull out a calculator and in a few minutes show us where we were going wrong. When we brought up insurance he concurred that we should go for it.

Talk to me about “Evergreen Inside.”

I believe that an employee-focused boss creates customer-focused employees. You have to not only listen

but act on your employees’ suggestions, critiques and ideas. We started an internal blog called “Evergreen Inside” where employees share their ideas, concerns and suggestions. Then we have a meeting where we discuss and try to implement what we can. You can do this with a shared document or any way you wish, but get your employees involved and you will be better off in the long run.

You are fond of saying, “Blaming your poor English language skills won’t make you rich.” Explain that line.

Until six years ago I could barely speak English. In fact, in one of my first meetings a client told me that he “had some concerns.” I excused myself for a minute, telling him I had an important phone call to make. I called my partner and asked him, “Does the word ‘concerns’ mean a good thing or a bad thing?”

I did not have a formal English education, but that didn’t stop me from succeeding.

I want to stand on the hilltops and tell everyone out there, “Don’t be afraid! There is so much opportunity out there! You can make it!” Our clients are people we’d never have imagined doing business with. It takes work; some find it harder than others, but in the end, with hard work and lots of *davening*, you can do it, too. ●

To suggest a candidate for this column, or questions for Lunch Break interviewees, please contact us at nesanel@amimagazine.org.

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