

LUNCH BREAK



Barry Slovisky
Company:
Eight to Eighty Eyewear

Age: 59
Industry: Eyewear manufacturing
Established: 2008
Employees: 30+
Headquarters: North Bellmore, NY

BY NESANEL GANTZ



Barry Slovisky is one of the largest manufacturers and sellers of fashion-forward value eyewear. Despite a difficult beginning, Barry built his company from scratch and turned it into an industry giant. Today he sells to more than 1,500 active accounts and has more than 250 distributors of his glasses brands across the US and abroad.

I found several pieces of advice he gave to be refreshingly simple, concise and adaptable. For example, recognizing the value of print even in an online world, the benefits of constant campaigns, and the importance of samples are lessons that can be applied to many industries. Practical, implementable advice—enjoy!

—Nesanel

“I was born and raised in Brooklyn. My parents separated when I was 11 years old, but they did their best to raise me together even though they were apart. I still feel I had a good upbringing and that my parents were there for me and active in my life. First I went to Yeshiva of Flatbush and then I went to local schools through high school. Where I grew up, every area in Brooklyn had its own ethnic background mix; mine was a combination of Jewish and Irish.

“I was a bit of a troubled kid, and I started getting involved with the kids on the streets. I got into some fights in school and started hanging out with the wrong crowd.

I became involved in stealing cars, but it was the theft of a car that had a major positive impact on my life. We stole a car, used it for a bit and dumped it, but it was damaged. The owner called the cops and filed a police report, and I had to show up in court the next day. When I arrived, they announced, ‘Next case: Slovisky vs. Rosenberg.’ I didn’t know it at the time, but the car belonged to a Jew named Mr. Rosenberg.

“Mr. Rosenberg looked at my father and asked, ‘Are you Jewish?’ When my father replied that we are, Mr. Rosenberg turned to the judge and said, ‘Your honor, I would like to drop all charges on the condition that this young man comes to my home for a Shabbos dinner.’ The judge asked me if I





Boxes of Eight to Eighty frames

agreed, which, of course, I did.

"I went to Mr. Rosenberg for Shabbos, and although it took me a while to get out of my troubled days, that Shabbos molded my life in a way. It showed me how we are a special people, and seeing how Mr. Rosenberg believed in me and saw the good within me left a real lasting impression and pushed me to better myself.

"Even as a teenager, I was always looking for ways to make a couple of dollars, and I had a couple of interesting experiences along the way. I worked as a bellman and as a busboy in many of the bungalow colony restaurants that existed back in the day. I once worked at Sleepy's Bedding and the store got robbed while I was in it; it was traumatic. What made it even more difficult was that the owner accused me of setting up the whole thing myself.

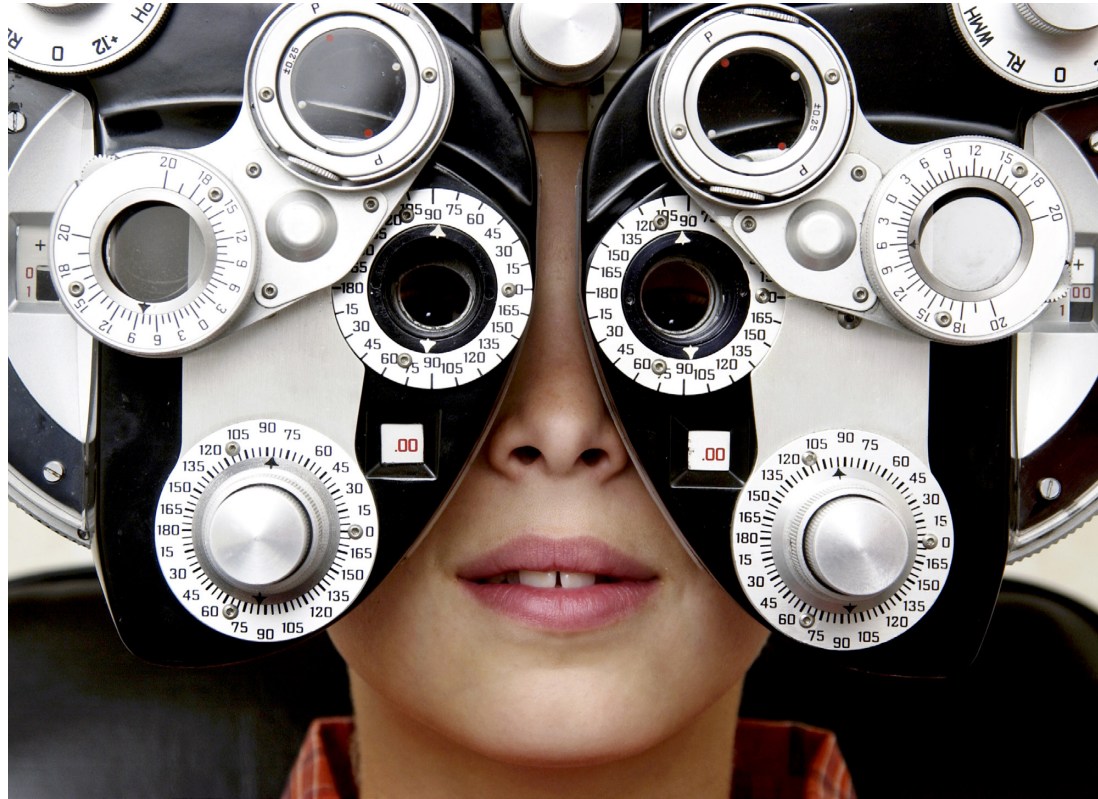
"I was between jobs in 1981 and picked up the Yellow Pages. I always felt I could sell, and I found a company out of Boro Park that imported glasses from France. I started selling them wholesale to other retailers. In a year, I built up a nice business as an independent rep. Around a year and a half later,

I began working for my future father-in-law, Alan Zimberg. He had a new business called Zimco that imported frames from France and Korea. The company manufactured frames and sold them directly to resellers. I took the job for half the amount I was earning at the time. It was worth it to me, though, because I saw a future in the company and I also had a date set for my wedding. I took to my father-in-law and we became very close.

"I started off at the bottom, learning how to pick orders, check orders and oversee inventory. Then I started doing some of the purchasing with my father-in-law. We worked together and eventually I became president of the company, overseeing marketing and sales. I learned the ropes of the inside handling of the business, but I mostly handled the outside part of the business. At that point, I did all the purchasing. Together, we built up Zimco from a relatively small business to a company worth more than \$10 million.

"I will be honest with you about some of the difficulties I went through, but I want to emphasize that those difficulties got me to where I am today.

"Mr. Rosenberg said, 'Your honor, I would like to drop all charges on the condition that this young man comes to my home for a Shabbos dinner.' The judge asked me if I agreed, which, of course, I did."



I got divorced after 14 years of marriage and three children. I am fortunate that I had very supportive friends who helped me through the difficult times. Unfortunately, family politics became mixed up with the company and I was demoted to make way for another family member. They never fired me; it was my decision to leave. I was being squeezed out, though, and I was tired of being pushed down and underappreciated. The writing was on the wall for me to leave.

"My ex-wife chose the company over me, and I began what would be a long process of divorce. I left the company at the same time that I separated from my wife, and all my finances were frozen. It was a very difficult time for me. I was kicked out of my nice house, had no income, and for lack of a better term, I was homeless until I found my own place. I was down in the dumps in every shape and form. To this day, though, I get along with Alan; he is a great man.

"It took me five long years and lots of heartache and hardship, but fortunately, I moved on and am now happily remarried. It's amazing how the right

woman can change your life for the better.

"Back then, the eyeglasses industry was smaller, and I was recruited by several companies. I ended up striking a deal with a company called New Millennium Eyewear. I opened up a new wholesale division and worked there for some time, but after I settled the divorce and was happily remarried, I wanted to go out on my own.

"When I knew that I would be leaving my previous company, I already put in some orders with other factories so that I had a relationship with them on a personal level. I brought those connections along with me to my new company. I started selling on August 1 of that year, which happens to be my birthday. The company started in the basement of my home. My new sister-in-law helped me sort the inventory and ship out the orders. We did everything ourselves. We would get the order, check the order, invoice it, box it and ship it. As we grew, we started to bring in new help, especially for the invoicing. My sister-in-law is still with the company; today she is the controller and handles all the accounting and receivables.

"Slowly but surely, we grew Eight to Eighty to be-

"We built up Zimco from a relatively small business to a company worth more than \$10 million."



come one of the largest value-brand eyewear companies in the US. Our clients include wholesalers (distributors) as well as many chain optic stores. We sell well over a million frames a year, and we are one of the top in the country for the value frames industry. If you visit any optical shop, from a store to a mall, the odds are that they carry our brand."

Today, people in the industry know your brands, but how did you get in the door? How did you sell yourself?

I would ask the potential client whether he had heard of us, and if not, I would simply tell him what we do: we sell value eyewear, we have a great collection, and we have great prices.

I think the key to a successful sales call is adjusting your pitch and tone to match the person you are speaking with. If he seems to be in a rush, ask for a few seconds. If he likes to talk, engage him. The key for me is to get the person to allow us to send a package of samples. We send our samples together with

a return label. The person keeps what he wants and can send the rest back.

We also have what's called a "guaranteed frame sale," which means that if the frame doesn't sell, we will take it back as long as it is within our current line of frames. This is rare in our industry, and obviously it does eat into our bottom line, but it enables our clients to buy without worry.

Why is it so important to get those samples out?

It's more cost effective. Most of the competition has physical sales reps in the field. When you have salespeople, you have to pay for their tolls, their sample bags, and it is generally more of a headache to manage. This way, the process is simplified.

One of the reasons that mailing sample bags is so successful is the fact that people get to view the samples on their own time. Although it might seem counterintuitive, having a salesman go into the store might impede sales, because people don't

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want the pressure of having to make a decision with someone looking at them, waiting for them to decide. Obviously, for larger accounts we do have dedicated salespeople, but that's more to service them than to pressure them. Creating a non-pressured method for potential customers to view your products will help boost your sales.

How have you dealt with the backlog caused by the supply chain issues currently affecting everyone (which many blame on COVID)?

I'm not saying I had zero issues, but it didn't affect me too much because I planned ahead. I still do. When I saw that there might be issues, I worked with different factories and ordered a larger quantity and further in advance. Even more recently, when I place my orders, it's for larger amounts than before.

A big issue that many companies face is that they are constantly trying to fill their orders based on the same quantity they ordered pre-COVID. That's a mistake. You have to be cognizant of the issues and order more at a time and further in advance, which I have been doing for a while.

How else do you bring in business?

I do a tremendous amount of e-blasts to email addresses that I have accumulated over time. We send out weekly offers to our potential clients and highlight new products. Of course, 99.9% of companies ignore them, but some respond. We have an open rate of about 0.8 percent and a click rate of about two percent. It doesn't sound like much, but it works.

That's interesting. I assume that whoever wants to unsubscribe will do so within the first few times of getting an email from you. For those who don't unsubscribe, you are in the back of their mind.

Exactly. When we first started the company, we were opening three to five new accounts a week. It has slowed down, but we still sign new clients weekly. The advantage of sending emails even when people don't open them is that they see them, so when they want to act and place an order for their company, you are in their mind. At the end of the day, emails work. We also drop our catalogues in clients' mailboxes.

You mail a print catalogue? Isn't that outdated?

We do mail it, and we also drop it off at many retailers and trade shows. Even in the digital world, people like seeing

CANDIDATE FAQ

Q: How do I find a job using YidJob?

A: You can apply to any or multiple posted jobs on the site, your application will go directly to the employer.

You can also post your public profile so employers can find and reach out to you.

Q: How can I narrow down my search?

Search the job form by selecting your desired location and category.

Q: Do I need a resume to apply?

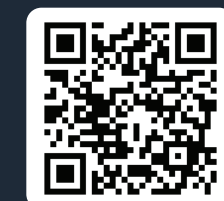
A: It depends on the employer, some employers require you to upload a resume or apply with a YidJob profile.

Q: Do you offer resume writing?

A: Yes, you can order our resume services with a few clicks, one of our writers will reach out to you directly.

Q: Is there a fee job seekers?

A: No. It's absolutely FREE for job seekers



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things in print, holding the print version in their hands. There is a certain calmness and focus that occurs when people shop with a physical catalogue. This isn't simply my opinion, my customers tell me this all the time.

Why the name "Eight to Eighty"?

Back when I was talking to a friend about starting my own company, he asked me, "Who do you plan on selling to?" My immediate response was, "Anyone from eight to 80." My friend said, "That's the name of your new company!" The name stuck.

I think the expression popped into my head that day because it's something we used to say as children, referring to someone who would run everywhere instead of walking. We would say he'd go "from eight to 80" in a minute.

Do you make all your products in China?

They're made in China and Korea. We produce our frames in the same exact factories that produce some of the most popular brands you have heard of. And yes, you are sometimes paying more than 20 times what it costs to make that pair of glasses, often even more.

You mentioned that your sister-in-law is the company's controller. Is it that finances are not your strong point or that you find it beneficial to have other people manage different aspects of the company?

It's a bit of both. I believe that as an entrepreneur, you have to be able to do everything, but that does not mean you should do everything. I enjoy selling and I also like trusting other people and letting

them focus on what their strong points are.

I was never the best student when I was in school, and I like bringing in people who are smarter than me. I also like taking advice from people smarter than me and learning from what they do.

What is the biggest financial mistake you've made in business and what did you learn from it?

I would say it was back when I was working with Zimco. It was the late '80s and I wanted to do business with Walmart. I struck up a good relationship with the company, especially with the person who set up their optical dispensary. I got them to agree to a pilot program in a dozen of their stores. I was really excited and came back to Zimco with that big order. Walmart had one requirement, and that was that we have barcodes on all the product boxes. My father-in-law was a manufacturer by trade and didn't want to invest in the machinery and technology to create barcodes, so they passed on the Walmart order.

I learned from that to always jump on opportunities when they come my way, even if it feels difficult to do. In general, it taught me to take risks and figure out how to handle it later.

I have made some good moves, as well. For example, I bought Apple stock in 1998 and I still have it. I have sold some over the years to pay for certain important life events, but it was a very fortunate purchase.

You asked if we could speak at 7:30 a.m. This is the earliest I have ever conducted a "Lunchbreak" conversation. Are you always ready to go this early?

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Cash in on your life settlement investment.

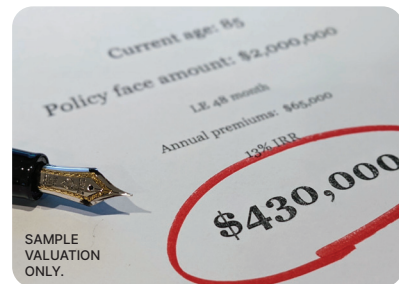
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EXCELSIOR CAPITAL



A selection of frames sold by Eight to Eighty

I am. I come in early to the office; that's when I have my creative time. I make my checklists for the day early in the morning, and then I answer emails, do my ordering, and go through all the company reports, which includes evaluating what to do with each style frame we have. I oversee the inventory myself.

Coming in early gives me the space to do the parts of my job that I do by myself. Once the standard workday begins, then of course I work with the team. For all entrepreneurs, I would suggest trying to come to work early and seeing how much they can accomplish.

How do you deal with stress?

I don't do well with stress, so I try to avoid

it. Meaning, I try to avoid getting myself into a stressful situation in the first place. When I do feel stress coming on, I try to pull back at the right time. If I feel anxiety coming on, I step away and drink some water to clear my head. I really try not to wait until I get to a boiling point. I'm not saying it never happens, but generally, I stay on an even keel. ●

Thank you to Ushi Teitelbaum, Ami's P.R. director, for the introduction. —Nesanel

I would love to know how you have implemented advice that you learned from "Lunchbreak." Shoot me an email at nesanel@amimagazine.org

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