



RABBI WARREN GOLDSTEIN UNITING PEOPLE AROUND SHABBOS >

<Let's Solve Our Housing Crisis Now: An Op-Ed by Nachman Caller

ISIS RECRUITING JEWISH GIRLS? • A PONZI SCHEMER'S WIFE: LIFE ON THE RUN



Ami
M A G A Z I N E

THE
HOUSING
CRISIS
LAKEWOOD

Fighting Ebola

\$4.99
OUT OF NY/NJ \$5.99
CANADA \$6.00
UK £4.50
EUROPE €5.50
ISRAEL NIS 16.90

ISSUE 183
OCTOBER 22, 2014
28 TISHREI 5776



Are we losing the battle?



Company established: 1988

Headquarters: Baltimore, MD

Employees: 20

2013 sales: \$50 million

Age: 55

Background: Michael S. Rodgers is the founder and CEO of Securityhunter, Inc., one of the largest privately owned security companies in the US. Since its establishment in 1988, Securityhunter has successfully served commercial and government markets with technologically advanced security solutions both custom and off-the-shelf. Michael was born in the Bronx, received an MBA in management from Cornell and ended up in Baltimore. Starting off on his own, he was able to develop Securityhunter into one of the largest providers of security solutions to the federal government. Clients include the US Departments of Agriculture, Defense, Energy, State and Homeland Security, as well as the Navy. Michael has said in numerous interviews that he feels he owes a "blood debt" to the US for its help in protecting Jews.

LUNCH BREAK

with Michael S. Rogers

How did you get into the security business?

When I was 17 and studying at Cornell, my next-door neighbor, Michael Leibowitz, who was only 18, started his own alarm company from his dorm room. He would sell self-contained alarm systems by placing ads in magazines such as *Popular Science*. That planted the seed in my head that I could run my own security company, especially if an 18-year-old could do it. I wanted to learn about security so I went to work as a salesman for a security company. Unfortunately, I was a horrible salesman, so I became a banking executive after two years of sales. I later learned that a good businessman is worth 25 salesmen.

How and why did you start your own company?

I decided I was going to teach myself electronics and learned all I could about alarm systems. I gave my bank a year's notice and quit on my fifth-year anniversary. The first year of my business I qualified for welfare and the second year I qualified for food stamps. I didn't take them. In the third year, I started getting good at installing covert video surveillance. I developed a wireless video transmitter, and our company transformed from covert video to regular alarm systems. We did various other things but it was taken to another level after we landed some federal contracts. I knew I was taking a chance, but you have to

give your dreams a chance, at least once.

How does your company provide security for federal government agencies?

The best analogy is that we are like chefs. We take the ingredients and figure out how to make a masterpiece. Let's say that the government is looking to be able to connect radar to a thermal camera that will be connected to video displays while simultaneously giving intercom control to a watch or phone; we connect all of those pieces. We figure out what is needed and subcontract the work for the actual installations.

How did you get federal

contracts?

Around the year 2000 we hired an ex-federal security guy, a Special Forces operator. He was injured at the time and today he hunts bomb makers in Iraq. When I hired him he was a lousy technician but he understood the way things work on the federal level. He encouraged us to go after federal security contracts. It takes a long time to get one and I made a lot of mistakes along the way, but that's how we started.

What would you advise someone seeking a federal contract?

It's doable, but it takes a lot of time and you cannot rely on it to grow your business. You're going to have to learn from experience. It's hard to get inside their heads. You can never understand what motivates them to accept your offer or not. It's like someone giving you a puzzle to solve without the original picture to work with. I never analyze why they turn us down for contracts but I study it intensely when they approve them because I want to see what works. There are a million ways to die; there aren't a million ways to live. One key, though, is to never look desperate. Put in a good offer and explain why you would benefit them. It took us ten years, but now we work with the federal government all the time.

Who decides if you get a contract?

It's just like launching a missile, in that you need two people to turn the key to get a contract from the federal government. First there's the "program manager" who has money budgeted in his account and is looking for a solution. Then there's the "contract manager" who has the ability to commit funds. We go after the contract manager; even though he doesn't have the money and is usually overlooked, he helps make the key decisions of who gets awarded contracts.

What is the benefit of working with the government?

The legacy of your company. Once you

develop a good relationship, they'll keep coming back to you and it can really take your business to the next level.

You've mentioned that you feel as if you owe a "blood debt" to America. Please explain.

Growing up in America when I did, there were lots of Jews walking around with [concentration camp] tattoos on their arms. I was keenly aware that everyone sold out the Jews with the exception of America, which demanded unconditional surrender from Germany. That was unlike Hungary and Poland, which gave up their Jews even if they fought the Germans. If we [America] hadn't done that, who knows where we would be? I feel as if I owe a debt to help protect America.

What's the key to running a multimillion dollar company?

The key is to view the business as an individual. You have to have a disconnect from it being *your* company. You can't take money from the business or make decisions that are affected by your personal life. View any money made as your business' money, not your own. A business is not yours to plunder; it's yours to grow.

What distinguishes you from other security companies?

We are probably the largest privately owned security company in the country, with sales close to \$50 million a year. Because of our federal experience, I believe we have the unique ability to get involved in all sorts of different projects. We were recently called to Colombia to help its department of defense in fighting FARC and the narcoterrorists. In general, I believe we have worked to become a credible company where you can talk to the CEO directly.

What was your worst moment in business?

I don't know; I've had so many. I've had



MXM
COLLECTION
MADE IN ITALY

VERTU
ITALY

BOSS
HUGO BOSS

TED BAKER®
LONDON



EMPORIO

the IRS shut down our cash flow. I've had the government say we were in default, which wasn't the case. I've had contracts stop. Look, life isn't supposed to be so simple. When things come up you have to deal with them. I'm not fighting in the Warsaw ghetto. We have to stop feeling sorry for ourselves.

What's the latest in today's security?

I would say that the latest breakthrough is the ease of setting up surveillance in the home. They have these wonderful devices that stream to your smartphone and operate on motion sensors. You don't have to pay a monthly fee. It's the common accessibility to security that's the latest trend.

Are some security companies becoming obsolete?

In essence, yes. Technology allows the younger generation to make waves. Today you don't need a landline for a camera; you can set up a wireless camera to stream to your smartphone in minutes. It's very hard for old companies to adapt. In my office there's a big poster of a Tyrannosaurus rex chasing a smaller dinosaur. I view myself as the little dinosaur. People feel that if they get the big account or they're doing well they can relax. But you shouldn't relax. Things are never calm in business.

What's the best business advice you ever received?

Watch your cash. You can grow too fast and lose it. For example, if you sell *Pesachdike* cakes, you get all these orders and it's great. Then you have to buy the ingredients, hire people and bake them. But it will be three months until you get paid, and in the middle of it all you can't make payroll. I've made so many mis-

takes in this area. Manage your cash and understand what's needed to make your business last for a while, not just for today.

And the key to being a good boss?

Lead with bravery and intelligence. This means making the tough calls and not being afraid of dealing with difficult situations. You'll attract the best people and they will follow you. Plus, you make things happen.

Name something that would make you hire or fire someone on the spot.

For hiring, I am looking for someone who, if I plunge my hand into his chest, my hand will burn. I want people with a passion for life; they make better workers. If someone has integrity issues, such as lying and throwing people under the bus to cover himself, he would be terminated immediately.

How do you find that being Jewish affects your professional life?

I've never had any bad interactions. I view business meetings as an opportunity to make a *kiddush Hashem*. Also, I believe that the stereotype of Jews being good with money helps us in business.

You mentioned that a good businessman is worth 25 salesmen.

A salesman cares about making a living for now, while a good businessman will look for the long-term relationship. You could call a good businessman an *uber* salesman, because in the end he will outsell a salesman ten to one.

You have an impressive list of

clients.

While we're the largest provider of security for the Army, Navy and Homeland Security, there are several agencies where our business with them is pretty small. It's very important in business to always look bigger than you are. Try to get a big-name client, even if the job is small and you don't make any money. Having a major name as a client is worth money in itself.

What advice you would give to protect our shuls and schools?

I believe we have to be vigilant. I'm not speaking halachically, but I would recommend that every *shul* have someone who is armed. I think that every Jewish household should be armed as well. They came for us in Europe and they could come for us again. I guess you could call me a Second Amendment Jew, but I'm also speaking from my experience in security. A large-scale attack can be prevented by one armed person. Of course, the armed person should undergo training in firearms. Remember, cameras only protect from the next attack.

Do you have a personal motto of success?

I live my life so that when I look in the mirror, I have to respect the man I see. Goals come and goals go, but if you sell out, they are meaningless. You have to respect yourself as a Jew and as a businessman and let that be your guiding light. ●

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