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JOSEPH BRAZEN
*The Real Estate King
of West Bellevue*

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Joseph Brazen

The *Real Estate King* of West Bellevue

By Lyle Myers

We've all heard that catchy little quote by W.E. Hickson; "'Tis a lesson you should heed, Try, try again. If at first you don't succeed, Try, try again.'" Joseph Brazen, founder of The Brazen Group Real Estate Company in Bellevue, might have a similar quote, only with quite a different spin. It may go something a little more like, "'Tis a lesson I shall heed, once I do begin. If at first you DO succeed, succeed again and again."

When it comes to being a very successful real estate agent and broker, including being selected by Howard Britton as a Star Of The Month, and then starting all

over again in a completely new area, Joseph Brazen has had more experience than most. In fact, he is a popular speaker at seminars nationwide, showing others how to do what he has done *not once, not twice, but three times!*

Born in Chicago, Joseph's family moved out to Southern California when he was still quite young. His father, a U.S. Navy officer, was stationed in Hollywood, where he finished out his Navy career as a technical advisor for television shows and movies that involved the Navy. His dad's job included reading the scripts to ensure that the

Navy was portrayed accurately and favorably, and to coach the actors and actresses on how Navy personnel dressed and conducted themselves.

As a kid, Joseph enjoyed visiting his dad on the sets and getting the opportunity to meet big stars like Ernest Borgnine and Tim Conway of "McHale's Navy," and Henry Fonda and Lucille Ball, who co-starred in the movie *Yours, Mine, and Ours*. Hanging out with movie stars is something most kids (and adults!) only dream about. These early experiences would have a lasting impression on young Joseph, and influence his career choices later in life.

After receiving a degree in business at Cypress College in California, Joseph started exploring his career options. Mike Fallon, a top real estate agent in Anaheim, saw that with his affable personality and self-motivation Joseph could make a great real estate agent. Joseph realized that he could make a good living doing real estate and decided to give it a shot.

"Work your real estate career like a business."

He started working nights in a grocery warehouse to pay the bills while working at real estate during the day. "I would go work the graveyard shift at 11 P.M. with all these lifers," Joseph remembers, "and then go home at seven in the morning, shower, put on a shirt and tie and spend the day selling real estate."

Fallon took Joseph under his wing and trained him in the ways of real estate. "I went in there and just listened to him and did everything he said," recalls Joseph. "Lessons like 'you've got to list to last' and 'develop a plan and stick with it.' To this day I use the lessons I learned from him." Joseph started selling homes in Anaheim, which back then were averaging about \$85,000. After about nine months, and with a few deals under his belt, Joseph was able to quit the warehouse job, and never looked back. He's still selling homes 23 years later.

Joseph worked in real estate for the next four-and-a-half years, successfully selling homes and developing his marketing skills. Even though at 26 years old he was on the fast track to becoming one of the youngest superstars in real estate, the lure of Hollywood called back from his childhood days, as Joseph had origi-



If not on the road showing property, attending a broker's open, taking a listing, coaching girls basketball or organizing a charity fundraiser, you'll find Joseph on the phone with his clients. (Photo by Koenig Photography.)

nally aspired to be a Hollywood writer. He gave up his successful business and moved to Hollywood in pursuit of his dreams. "If I thought real estate was hard, I really got worked over as a writer," Joseph laughs.

The best thing to happen to him during his "Hollywood years" was meeting actress Randi Brooks. During the 1980s she appeared in more than 70 TV shows, playing everything from Mancuso's assistant, Jean St. John, in "Mancuso, FBI," for 22 weeks on NBC, to a villainous bad girl in an episode of "Magnum, P.I.," to the popular witch Bethel in "Wizards and Warriors." She also enjoyed leading roles in movies like *Cops* (1988) and *Tightrope* (1984), among many others.

It was your typical Hollywood whirlwind romance. They met in November and married in January. "We just met and fell in love," says Joseph. "I was writing, she was acting, and we were living the Hollywood lifestyle."

For the next few years, life for this highly popular couple was a Hollywood storybook that most of us just dream about. Joseph had earned a solid reputation as a writer in the *behind the scenes* movie world, and Randi could be seen almost daily by the American television viewing audience. But their glamorous lifestyle was about to change, as the writers' strike of 1988 hung resolutely over Hollywood.

Around the same time, Randi had become a stay-at-home mom with the birth of their first daughter, Cody. With a brand new baby keeping Randi at home Joseph knew they couldn't afford to wait out the strike, so he went back to doing what he knew and excelled in: residential real estate. Once again he found his area to develop and began selling homes in the Glendale suburbs.

Getting back into real estate came easily for Joseph. It really just came down to implementing the same principles and fundamentals of selling that he had learned years before in Anaheim. He picked his area, started farming it and soon worked his way up to being a top agent once again.

In 1992 Howard Britton, a real estate guru and STAR Power Club founder, made Joseph one of his *Stars of the Month*. "When that happens," explains Joseph, "it gives you instant national exposure and name recognition. It really puts you on the map nationwide." Even today Joseph estimates 30 percent of his business comes from out of area referrals, from other agents who know of him because of his connection with Britton.

After this career-empowering experience occurred, it was only natural for Joseph to leave the real estate firm he was with and forge his own company. "I'd come to a place where I had a really good team, Britton had put me on the map, and so we ended up opening the Brazen Group Real



Randi, seen here playing Detective Loggia's secretary on the television show "Mancuso" in the 1980s, never envisioned one day she would be playing the real life Marketing Director for her very successful Realtor® husband, Joseph Brazen.

Estate Company in Glendale, CA."

Over the next two years the company flourished, and the Brazen family grew to include two more beautiful daughters, Joey and Taylor. Now that they knew real estate worked for them, they began to wonder if Southern California was really the place where they wanted to raise their kids. They began taking weekends and vacations to go explore other parts of the country in search of a new hometown. They visited Colorado, Idaho, Oregon and several other cities in

California. Then in 1993, they came to Seattle and fell in love with the area. The city was just the right size, they loved all the water, and there were plenty of professional sports teams to enjoy. They found that Seattle was the first place they really talked about when they got back home to California.

After a month filled with much discussion and reflection, they traveled back to Bellevue and spent an entire week in the city, in order to see just how much they really liked it. It just so happened that the

"You've got to list to last. Develop a plan and stick with it"



Joseph is proud of the fact that he can do a great job for his clients, while always taking quality time to coach his three daughters on two different girls basketball teams. (Photo by Koenig Photography.)

very same week they were in Bellevue, the Washington Association of Realtors® was holding its annual convention there. Crashing the event seemed like a great idea, as it would give them the opportunity to compare Washington agents with those from California.

When they arrived at the convention, they happily discovered that Howard Britton was one of the featured keynote speakers. The two parties agreed to have breakfast the next morning, where they filled Howard in on how much they liked the area, but were still unsure as to how the real estate market would treat them compared to California. The fear of the unknown, of making the wrong decision, held them back.

In typical Howard Britton fashion, Howard suggested that the only way to arrive at a decision at this point would be to flip a coin. "I'll tell you what," Joseph recalls Howard saying. "You guys are stuck. There's no other way to do this; why don't we flip this coin. If it's heads you move to Seattle. Tails, you stay home." While the coin was still spinning through the air Joseph and Randi both said "heads" and held their breath. With that, Britton snatched the coin out of the air and returned it to his pocket unseen. "Well," he declared, "I guess you made your decision." With their mid-coin-toss affirmation in mind they went back to Glendale, packed up and moved north to their new home.

Of course, what this meant for the Brazens was that they would be starting all over again. A different state with a different set of real estate rules to learn, a new market to become

familiar with, and they would be living in an area where they had no family or friends. Britton set up several meetings for Joseph with some of the area's big real estate companies. In the end, Joseph chose Coldwell Banker Bain, as they were most able to meet his needs.

As he had done twice before, Joseph put his head down and went to work. He culled the lessons he had learned over the years and put them to good use. Principles like make a plan, follow it like religion, and *market, market, market* became the tenets of his game plan. It took him from when he started in November until the following March to make his first sale. "It was hard," he recalls. "I went from knowing it all in Glendale and being on top of my game, to just knowing nothing."

Although starting out during the holidays was difficult both for sales and for the family being new to the area, hard work and persistence paid off. After the first sale in March led to more sales, the business started to grow. Today Joseph Brazen is a leader in a market whose average home sells for \$790,000!

Joseph believes that the reason he has been able to successfully start over three times can be attributed to a few key fundamentals. He works his real estate career like a business. He goes to work every morning at 7:30 and goes home each night at six. He develops and implements a business plan. As he learned from Mike Fallon years ago, "When you work that plan every day, every week, every month, the numbers will start working for you.

"I'm a farmer," Joseph continues. "I work an area and I work it and I work it. I chose Bellevue, and I set as my goal to be the *Real Estate King of West Bellevue*. I mailed, I knocked, I did



everything I could in West Bellevue over and over again. It just takes time for people to get to know you and trust that you will do a great job for them. You've got to plant all those seeds and then you've got to wait for the harvest to come in. When you're going through that first six to nine months you see yourself spending a lot of money and time and getting nothing back, but it does happen, and I knew the game plan we set up would work. I just had to see it out."

After they saw it out, they made it through the first year. The second year they doubled their business, the third year they doubled their business again and after that it just kept growing. Joseph's tenacity had paid off abundantly for the third time.

For Joseph, an essential component of starting out in his new area meant joining organizations like the Rotary Club and the country club in order to make friends and business contacts. One of the uniquely clever things he did to learn more about the area was to become a member of the Bellevue Historical Society.

"I would go to those meetings with these older ladies and men who could have been my grandparents," he says. "We would sit down and they would tell



me about how Bellevue got started, who founded it, et cetera, and I came home with all of these stories. Now when I'm out with a buyer and they have questions about Bellevue, or Bellevue Square or Meydenbauer Bay, I can give them a little more of that color. Sometimes I think I know more about Bellevue than people who grew up here do," he laughs. Joseph

"First class doesn't cost a penny more" attitude.

also made it a point to learn the infrastructure of Bellevue, including the names of the various schools, parks and other important municipal information, as



Joseph and his Brazen Group know how to work hard, but also know that enjoying what you do is just as important. Here is Joseph with his support team (left to right): Hanif Ratansi, Kathy Madsen, Randi Brazen, Ann Carson and Stewart Maxwell at one of their team meetings. (Photo by Koenig Photography.)

quickly as possible.

Although at first considered to be a little different by the other agents at Coldwell Banker Bain, for among other reasons, being from the land of sprouts and tofu, and for putting his picture on his business cards, something no one in Seattle did at the time, Joseph soon found his place as the company's leading agent. "Now the irony is that everybody has their photo on their business card," he quips. Today no one at the Brazen Group has their picture on their card, another lesson from the Mike Fallon

days. "Always do the 180. If everyone else does something, like putting their photo on their card, do the opposite so you stand out."

After four-and-a-half years with Coldwell Banker Bain, Joseph felt the urge to break away and go out on his own. He, Randi and an assistant found a spot in a strip mall that felt right and they set up shop once again as The Brazen Group Real Estate Company. After three years of growing the business in that location, Joseph again felt the urge to move, but this time to his own building. After putting out the feelers and doing some looking around, a commercial Realtor® contacted him about the historical 1915 building on Main Street in "Olde Bellevue." The Brazen Group purchased the charming old building, gave it a \$300,000 facelift and moved in. With its warm, cozy atmosphere and child-friendly climate, it is the perfect forum for Joseph and his Brazen Group, as it serves to reinforce their strong desire to provide every client with their own *Ultimate Real Estate Experience*.

Joseph and The Brazen Group believe that for every client *The Ultimate Real*



Joseph seen here with his daughters (left to right): Joey, age 12, Taylor, age 11, Cody, age 14 and wife Randi.

Estate Experience is different and special. Although for some it may mean finding the perfect price, for others, it is the extra focus and attention that they receive. The Brazen Group incorporates a number of systems to ensure that every client gets their own uniquely ultimate experience. Their office manager ensures that these systems are carried out consistently, so that every client is represented in brochures, note cards, on the 10,000 hits per month generating Web site, in eCards, in various real estate magazines and newspapers, all the way down to making sure each "For Sale" sign gets balloons.

As the rainmaker for the company, Joseph's job is to list, sell and negotiate, and he has created and put in place a team of assistants around him to get the rest of the work done. Although her title is Director of Marketing, Randi has been working with Joseph since they were in Glendale, and in addition to playing that role, she is also the office's number one motivator, as well as its "can do anything" person.

Joseph's supporting team also includes an office manager, a full-time escrow transaction closer, a graphic designer and

with top Realtors® from other areas of the country several times a year. "You get together with 50 of the greatest minds in real estate—all in the same room," explains Joseph. "It gives you the opportunity to exchange ideas and bring new ones back to your market, to help you serve clients better."

In addition to running The Brazen Group, Joseph is extremely active in his community. With three talented athletic daughters in basketball, it became natural for Joseph not to stay on the sidelines. He coaches several girls basketball teams, organizes hugely successful money raising events for local schools, has been chairman of the popular Medina Days summer festival for the past seven years, and the list goes on and on.

With their "first class doesn't cost a penny more" attitude and their dedication to *The Ultimate Real Estate Experience* for each and every client, the Brazen Group Real Estate Company is poised to lead the way for a long time to come. Along with his tireless community-spirited efforts to boot, it's no wonder Joseph Brazen can truly be called "The King of West Bellevue!"

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Real Estate Executive Magazine is published monthly and distributed by mail to agents and brokers within the King, Snohomish, Skagit and Island Counties. The Front Cover Story each month is of a successful Realtor® who has been nominated by their peers from within the real estate community. Quality of service to their clients and community involvement are as important as volume of business when being considered. Reprints of a front cover story are permitted only when produced through Sunshine Media, Inc. to ensure story information for a 3rd party endorsement to the public is factual and has not been altered in any way.

—Publisher, Sharman Burnam