

Joe Offenbacher
CEO, Brisk Beverages, Ltd.

Age: 51
Marital Status: Married
to Aviva,
four children



■ By YOCHAVED MIRIAM RUSSO

Job description: At the moment, I'm a jack of all trades, doing everything required to bring FreeZee – an ice-cold, thirst quenching and delicious beverage – to Israel. We've imported all the machines and flavored syrups from the US, and have been working with all kinds of experts in many different fields to get the machines up and running, first in Modi'in and ultimately all over Israel.

Aliya: From New York, 2004

Education: Yeshiva University, major in psychology, plus a master's in industrial and organizational psychology.

How did you get into this? For almost 20 years before making aliya, I had a messenger, package delivery and trucking company in Manhattan. Coming here, I wanted to find a similar situation, a business I could build from the ground up, which would eventually give me the kind of freedom a business owner enjoys. My son Rafi came up with the original idea for FreeZee. He complained that he couldn't get a Slurpee, which is what the drink is

called in the US. I looked into it and saw how incredibly popular Slurpees and Icees – another brand – are in the US. No one had introduced this drink in Israel before. That's where the idea to put FreeZee machines all over Israel began.

Your first job? Babysitting, probably, but my first real job was working for Westside News Service, the company that delivers newspapers all over Manhattan.

Worst job? Working as a headhunter. I stayed a whole year because I was taking a Dale Carnegie Sales course that required you to stay in your job for a year. Making all those cold calls wasn't easy.

High moment? Just after we brought the first machine into the store, set it up on the metal stand, a little kid came in, maybe seven or eight. He looked at the machine and was just speechless. All he could say was "Wow!" and "Is that really..?" and "That's my favorite!" His mother came in and he begged her to promise they would come back when it was running. If I'd had a video camera that would have been the best commercial ever made.

Low moment? I spent four hours connecting up that first machine, making sure everything was done right. Then I spent an hour and a half on my cell phone with customer support in the US, having them check to make sure it was ready. The guy said, "Okay, turn it on." So I did. The syrup went flying all over the place – I hadn't noticed that the hose wasn't

hooked up to the machine. The mess was beyond belief, heavy-duty concentrated cherry syrup sprayed all over the place, coating everything. I said, "That's it. I'm out of here. I can't handle it." Hours later, people were still telling me I smelled like cherries.

Is anything you do controversial? Not yet, but we'd love to have customers debating which flavor is best. Right now there are 153 different flavors available, but they can make anything. If Israelis love passion fruit, we can do that.

What are the perks in this job? Every day I learn something new. That, plus meeting dozens of wonderful new people. I've been amazed to see so many people go out of their way to help us.

What other business ideas did you consider? Four made it to the final discussion stage. The next best was a variation on a dry-cleaning operation.

Where's the first FreeZee location? In Modi'in, in the Kaiser neighborhood. The

next set will go into Jerusalem, to the central bus station, on Ben-Yehuda and one in Emek Refaim.

What do you see yourself doing in five years? I'll have far fewer cherry stains on my head, that's for sure. I'll have technicians doing a lot of the maintenance, although I enjoy doing that part, too. When I had the messenger service in Manhattan, I loved leaving the office, getting out and delivering stuff, meeting the customers. Selling FreeZees will be even more fun.

What's your biggest accomplishment? Celebrating 25 years of marriage. Being able to see my kids grow up here.

What's your dream? To go back to something I did before we started this, spending more time in kollel [part-time yeshiva] and learning with my son. I'll spend a couple of years killing myself working these crazy hours, but it's all worth it when I see people walk out of the store sipping FreeZees with big smiles on their faces. ■

take out

BY HANNAH BROWN

Sweet Smell of Success

Newspapers may be closing every day, but the press heyday is preserved in a handful of movies and this is one of the best. Burt Lancaster plays famed newspaper columnist J.J. Hunsecker (based on Walter Winchell), who manipulates and torments everyone around him. Ambitious and ruthless publicist Sidney Falco (Tony Curtis, scarily convincing as a man with the morals of a sewer rat) and Hunsecker's own confused younger sister are his main victims. Clifford Odets wrote the now-legendary stylized dialogue.

