

Derr

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They called a real estate agent who made it known he was earning far more than Brown could ever expect to make in the classroom. That financial realization made an impact--so much so that Brown took an extended leave from his teaching to train in the Torrance realty offices of Cliff Warren. The understanding was that if he didn't like the property business, he would head back to school and pick up his chalk and eraser where he had left off.

Brown, the father, ended up liking real estate, a lot. And, even though the promise of bigger paychecks was what first enticed him to the industry, he's clear it wasn't his ultimate reason for staying. "I could have been the happiest teacher ever," Brown said, but, "I'm a people person...and I believe strongly in home ownership."

Brown's interest in helping others through one of the biggest purchases of their lives was apparently infectious, because it bit his son hard. Of course, the younger Brown had seen his dad work through real estate deals since his earliest years. "When I was in high school, I sat in on open houses," he said.

Kirk, the son, began his formal introduction to the biz began while he attended college, though he didn't immediately put out his shingle after graduation. For a while, at least, he followed the lead of his older sister

Carianne, who works in entertainment. The younger Brown snagged a job with Miramax, where, he says, he gained a greater perspective of the quirky side of corporate life. Eventually, "the joy I grew up seeing" began pulling him back to the lots of El Segundo.

Some point along the way, Kirk, the son, decided he liked real estate as much as Kirk, the father. The energy he gets out of selling homes, the younger said, is "just something you have to feel. It comes with experience."

Any time a family moves into a new home, either one just purchased or a rental, said Kirk, the son, "it's an emotional experience. It's very satisfying." The proud father has seen his son mature into a truly considerate man, and the son, buoyed by his father's support, has grown more confident in his own abilities. Their relationship, the two Kirk Browns say, has evolved into an equal partnership.

TWO HEADS ARE BETTER

Lori O'Connor asserts that it's nice having a jokester in her office. "When he was younger, Dan was crazy, wild, very energetic, so funny," she said. "We were trying to convince him to get into comedy."

Of course, she added, "he's much more educated." Which no doubt was why Dan chose building a business with the mother he obviously adores in an industry he's always known instead of striking it out on his own

as a comic. Actually, it's pretty funny when the O'Connors are simply sitting around the office, bouncing comments off of one another. "You were thinner then," Lori said, glancing to her son. Then she redirected. "I'm loud and emotional and very Italian," Lori said with gleeful eyes. "Oh, she's a tiger! She's tough," added Dan. "We're no slouches," agreed Lori, who explained that her father Lorenzo, an immigrant from Italy who sailed through Ellis Island in the 1930s, taught his four children the importance of honest work.

"As far as work," Dan said of his mother, "she's not always 'on,' but she can always turn it 'on.' As far her clients, she's always been available, always been a problem-solver."

Back in the throes of new parenthood, Lori took up real estate because she assumed she could divide her time between selling and caring for her family. "I thought it was dabbly sort of work," she said. "I didn't know it was a friggin' 24/7 job." But now, she laughed, "it's something I can't seem to get out of my system." Even though she found her niche in real estate, Lori wasn't at all sure she wanted to see Dan doing the same thing. "I never prompted him to follow me," she said. "I was concerned about him getting into real estate because it's a very, very tough business." For the first three years of their eventual partner-

ship, Dan served as Lori's assistant--learning the ropes on hourly wages.

Yes, he knew the success wouldn't necessarily be automatic, and he'd have to crawl, as it were, before he could run. But Dan had already learned to cherish the life stories behind the deals. "I like how every single piece of real estate is different," he said, adding that "it's a big responsibility" when he's the one taking someone through buying or selling property. "Yes, it's an asset," said Dan, but in many instances "it's also their home."

The O'Connors proudly note that their production has remained relatively constant, even through the economic slump of the last few years. That's because the two have built their reputations and maintained their business with a personal, "hands-on" approach that focuses on leaving clients feeling welcome and appreciated, Dan said. The result is that an estimated 90 percent of the O'Connors' business comes from referrals. Between themselves, the team has twice the chance of making productive, new connections. "We have clients who like me, only me, or like him, only him," Lori said. Whoever calls on them and whatever deals may come their way, Lori knows her son will be able to handle it all.

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