

NEW YORK FEBRUARY 2020

# RESIDENT

THE  
*ICON*  
ISSUE

JAY  
ROSENZWEIG  
SOCIAL JUSTICE &  
ENTREPRENEURIAL  
SUPERSTAR





# JAY ROSENZWEIG

Social Justice & Entrepreneurial Superstar

*By* **JULIE SAGOSKIN** *Photographed By* **VITO AMATI**

When it comes to advancing human rights and equality, both around the world and in the workplace, superconnector and entrepreneur Jay Rosenzweig sees marrying his passions for business, sports, music and social justice as powerful engines to get there.

Rosenzweig, a business consultant, lawyer and humanitarian, founded Rosenzweig & Company in 2004, a global talent strategy firm. The company specializes in serving clients by being more nimble and innovative than big-firm competition. Hunt Scanlon, a leading publisher in the industry, calls Rosenzweig & Company “the leading international boutique.”

Jay Rosenzweig began advocating for diversity and fairness in the workplace years before it was fashionable. In 2006 he began the annual Rosenzweig Report, which tracks how many women are being hired for the top jobs at public corporations.

“When I discovered back in 2006 that only 4.6 percent of the top executive jobs in Canada for example were held by women, I was shocked and those numbers are similar in the US,” Rosenzweig says. “I knew the number would be low, but I didn’t realize it would be that low. The good news is that 14 years later, those numbers have doubled, but the bad news is that we’re still at less than 10

percent. We’ll keep doing this report, year after year, until I can hopefully work my way out of a job once we get fair and equitable representation for women in executive suites.”

Rosenzweig’s passion for social justice goes far beyond gender equality. To understand where it comes from, one need only go back to his college days. While studying at McGill University in Montreal, where he received two law degrees as well as a philosophy degree, Rosenzweig found a life-changing mentor named Irwin Cotler.

“He made a major impression on me then and still does today,” Rosenzweig says.



Cotler is a law professor and human rights advocate, who has represented political prisoners such as Nelson Mandela and Natan Sharansky and been immersed in virtually every significant human rights struggle over the past five decades. He was also a forward-thinking Attorney General and Minister of Justice of Canada from 2003-2006.

“Irwin Cotler instituted a myriad of progressive laws, including marriage equality legislation,” Rosenzweig says. “He also helped exonerate a record number of wrongfully convicted prisoners. He transformed our Supreme Court into the most gender representative at the time. He was also the first man on the women’s caucus. Cotler is extremely passionate about equality and is one of my greatest inspirations.”

Cotler founded a human rights organization called the Raoul Wallenberg Centre for Human Rights. Cotler still runs it and Rosenzweig is an active board member. “We are representing the Nelson Mandelas of today all around the world,” Rosenzweig says. “We are combatting hate, antisemitism and racism in all its forms. We speak out to prevent current and future genocides. We work to protect democracy around the world at a time when we are witnessing a global resurgence of authoritarianism. And, of course, women’s rights are an important cause for us.”

A recent highlight at the Raoul Wallenberg Centre is the Jens Söring case, a man who spent 33 years in a Virginia prison for a double murder he did not commit. Rosenzweig, being the superconnector that he is, set up an introductory lunch meeting in Manhattan between two friends he

was sure would hit it off, Cotler and Jason Flom, an iconic music executive and founding board member of the Innocence Project. By coincidence, Flom’s phone rang and it was Söring calling from prison. Flom passed the phone to Cotler and he spoke with Söring and pledged to help. After a prison visit, Cotler urged publicly for Jens’ immediate release, developed supporting pleadings for him and other strategies to gain his freedom. “We got the incredible news a few months later that Jens was free! We were elated. Jens was granted parole, and is now a free man, at home in his native Germany. We are not however 100 percent satisfied yet, as we believe the final step should be a complete declaration of Jen’s innocence as part of the administration of justice. But don’t get me wrong - Jens is finally a free man, and that is what is most important,” says Rosenzweig.

Looking back to the beginning of Rosenzweig’s career, it’s apparent he’s followed a progressive path all along. He’s always had a passion for justice and equality, and began by articling at a Toronto based law firm representing those wrongly convicted. This was at a time when DNA technology was becoming more and more reliable, and quickly became a tool to exonerate the innocent.

But then this ambitious young lawyer suddenly saw a business opportunity in the world of high-end talent acquisition. He took a job with a boutique firm that was ultimately acquired by Korn Ferry, the world’s largest firm in this specialized sector.

“It was an unexpected pivot, but a great opportunity,” Rosenzweig says. “I promised myself that if I left law permanently, I would find ways to help people and give back. I took to the

business quickly with this boutique firm, and then suddenly I was a young partner at Korn Ferry. I stayed a few years, but I’m an entrepreneur by nature, so I started my own firm to serve clients better than I could at a big global firm. My vision – which has been realized – was of a firm that could provide the most senior, research based, comprehensive and customized service to our clients for their most critical needs.”

Rosenzweig & Company has done work in places like Dubai, Brazil, Hong Kong, and all across Europe and North America. The firm recently placed the head of digital for a global, multi-billion-dollar financial services company; was hired by a private equity firm to find a CEO for an US\$80-million business they now own; and was hired by a venture capital firm to find a CEO for a ground breaking medical device business. The list keeps growing and repeat business is common. The aforementioned multi-billion dollar global corporation just hired his firm to find a head of innovation for them.

Jay Rosenzweig is also deeply involved in the emerging tech space. He advises dozens of businesses in this regard, including start-up founders and the venture capital firms who invest in them. The work he does ranges from helping to build first class teams, providing connections for fundraising purposes, business development and overall strategic advice. “I help them scale up so that they can ultimately achieve the success they aspire to, whether it be greater revenues, profitability, or a lucrative exit. Most of these businesses are based in Los Angeles, Silicon Valley, San Francisco, New York and Toronto,” he says.





Advocating for gender equality and diversity dovetails into the tech sector because the industry skews male. To that end, Rosenzweig helped his friend Jodi Kovitz build #movethedial, a tremendously successful and fast growing global movement to help advance women in tech. “Beyond the moral imperative of equal opportunity for all, it stands to reason that the more diversity around the decision-making table, the greater the opportunity for creativity and vision and results,” he says.

His branded Rosenzweig Report has received much attention globally. It has been cited in government reports, university research, various books and widely in the media. “We’ve gotten endorsements and contributions from important influencers such as Sheryl Sandberg, Deepak Chopra, Andrew Yang, Van Jones, Zainab Salbi, Chrystia Freeland, CEO’s and Board Chairs of banks, Toronto Mayor John Tory, and many more,” Rosenzweig says.

In addition to pinpointing the issues facing women, Jay believes men don’t want to be pigeonholed into a particular role, either. “Everyone has their own desires, personalities and aspects of life that motivate them, and that includes men. Whether they admit it or not, many men hate being boxed into the notion that they need to get their lunchbox and go to work. Some are more nurturing and prefer to be the “CEO of the family”, where they thrive, while the wife is the primary earner. There are many combinations and permutations which work best in the context of any given couple, individual or family. All these stereotypes need to be reassessed so that people aren’t forced into roles that don’t suit them, and therefore make them unhappy.”

Jay, who lives in Toronto with his wife and three children, says his number one priority is family. “My greatest source of pride and accomplishment will always be my family. Being there for my wife and kids is the most important thing in my life. I’m fortunate to have the infrastructure and support at home and at work to juggle family and full-time work, but I realize others need more flexibility.”

He’s on the advisory board of a NYC-based business, Werk, that addresses this issue. Werk develops flexible strategies for the workplace that help employees balance their lives effectively. The team worked with a professional services firm that couldn’t figure out why they were having trouble recruiting and retaining great talent. Werk made them realize that they could recruit and retain greater talent if they offered flexible work arrangements.



Photographed by Tom Sandler



“On the business development or sales side, you don’t necessarily need to work from 7am to 7pm – it might be that a few strategic calls can literally make your year,” Rosenzweig says. “If an average load at a professional services firm is 10 projects, why not give a rock star consultant five projects if she or he is only available 50 percent of the time? Sharing time is a concept that can work well for certain jobs. Again, we don’t need to stick with old workplace paradigms. The firm we advised implemented a new program, and they now have a much better recruitment and retention rate.”

Rosenzweig doesn’t stop there. He advises dozens of businesses and non-profits in areas such as health, climate change, transportation, education and politics. He’s worked with his friend Dikembe Mutombo, the Hall of Fame basketball player, to raise money and improve healthcare in Africa. He served on the board of One Young World, a global forum of young leaders from 200 countries when it was held in Ottawa.

Rosenzweig is working with Director X, famous for creating iconic videos for Drake, Rihanna, Jay-Z and many others, on an initiative called Operation Prefrontal Cortex. They, together with a broader multidisciplinary team, aim to reduce gun violence in Toronto through the implementation of meditation programs in high-risk schools, community centers and prisons. Studies show that meditation drastically improves the areas of the brain that regulate emotions and decision making.

Rosenzweig signed on recently to partner with an anti-gun violence

program in the U.S. started by artist Tay Da Prince. Tay, together with his uncle John Legend, is officially launching the program with a song called Love One Another, which will be released in the coming months. Jay was there for the filming of the video, which will be released along with the song. “I got a call from the crew telling me I made the cut and will be in the video, let’s see! It’s an absolutely beautiful song.”

Rosenzweig is a founding investor and advisor in Winston House, a center for creatives on the west side of L.A. “It was described by Billboard Magazine as driving the growth of the West L.A. music scene. Started in founder Corey McGuire’s loft, which can only hold 100-150 people, it has had the likes of Justin Bieber, Ed Sheeran, and Billie Eilish come through to experience music, and community, and inspiration in the most authentic ways.” Winston House is now expanding into a much bigger locale in Venice Beach over the course of the coming weeks. Says Rosenzweig enthusiastically: “It is about to go next level!”

Another interesting business out of Los Angeles whose advisory board Rosenzweig sits on is FullCycle, founded by Ibrahim AlHusseini. “Ibrahim has an interesting story. He is a child of Palestinian refugees who grew up in Saudi Arabia. He then went to college at the University of Washington. Profoundly disturbed by the planet’s rapid resource depletion, he determined to act as a catalyst for change. Ibrahim’s vision for FullCycle is to create an investment fund that accelerates the deployment of climate restoration technologies. “It has been my privilege to work with Ibrahim and his team to help them achieve

that vision. I also can’t help but think that there is something hopeful about a Jewish-Canadian working in such close harmony, and with such mutual respect, with a Palestinian-American,” Rosenzweig says.

While on the topic of climate change, Jay is also working on a massive project to save the planet with partner Ken Kragen, the master of accomplishing the impossible, who organized both We Are The World and Hands Across America. It is called Hands Around The World.

The first piece of this game-changing effort is a ‘We Are the World’ type anthem that is being composed by India’s Academy Award and Grammy winner, A.R. Rahman (Slumdog Millionaire),” Rosenzweig says.

The group gathered last week in LA to begin recording this song, with a star-studded group of artists. The day before, they gathered to celebrate the 35th anniversary of “We Are The World,” in the very same studio it was recorded. “It was a spectacular event,” he says. “It inspired us the next day to put everything we had into this new initiative, which is literally focused on saving this planet.”

Jay is passionate himself about writing songs, and you can even find his songs on Spotify and Apple Music.

This family man, entrepreneur, mentor and superconnector is continuing to plot moves that will have positive transformational impact in the world. So, look out for what’s next! ♦

[jayrosenzweig.com](http://jayrosenzweig.com)

