



Invictus Property Advisors' co-founder Andrew Levine is growing the firm into a formidable mid-market brokerage

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New York, NY The New York Real Estate Journal sat down with Andrew Levine, this month's Executive of the Month, for a question and answer session. Levine is co-founder of Invictus Property Advisors.

NYREJ: How did you get your start in commercial real estate?

Levine: I grew up immersed in New York City real estate. My mother came to America from the Soviet Union in 1979 with a few dollars in her pocket but rich with ambition and drive. She became a real estate broker in New York City, and I was fortunate enough to have a front-row seat watching her close deal after deal in one of the most competitive real estate markets in the world. Her hard work and perseverance as a single mother did more than put food on our table; it inspired and instilled a work ethic in me and a belief that if you push yourself to be caring and capable, others will

take notice. It felt very natural for me to go into the commercial real estate world. My first full-time position out of college was working for Massey Knakal (acquired by Cushman & Wakefield in 2015), a New York-based mid-market investment sales brokerage. I was able to gain invaluable experience on the job, absorb analytical and underwriting skills while interfacing directly with clients in my early 20s, and build relationships that I maintain and value today.

NYREJ: Starting an investment sales brokerage from scratch in arguably the most competitive market in the world is quite the undertaking. Was there a eureka moment when you and co-founder Josh Lipton realized that your business model works?

Levine: To be honest, there was never a moment like that. I didn't spend too much time worrying if our brokerage, Invictus Property Advisors, was going to "make it." We are proficient at both mass marketing properties to our network of tens of thousands of owners, investors, and developers to facilitate a transaction and a more targeted "off-market" approach when it is more advantageous to owners. The key to Invictus' success is ensuring client satisfaction while employing a flexible, tailor-made approach. In just the last few months, we have sold properties throughout NYC neighborhoods including Chelsea, Harlem, the Upper West Side, Sunset Park, Ridgewood, Bushwick, and Crown Heights. Regardless of the business model, a best-in-class brokerage comprises exceptional agents evaluating, marketing, selling, and executing all the workstreams that flow from these steps.

NYREJ: Before Invictus Property Advisors, you worked for several larger brokerages. With the benefit of hindsight, could you compare your experiences at the larger firms with what you're doing now?

Levine: Having the brand name of a larger brokerage certainly has its benefits, but in my experience, there were some limiting aspects as well. For example, if you are a terrific agent and originate transactions throughout New York City despite being assigned to, say, the Upper East Side, the economics to that agent are diminished when he or she originates a deal in, say, the Upper West Side. Sharing the fee internally is perhaps admirable, but it can also breed complacency. There is some nuance to this, and I don't want to paint what larger brokerages do with a broad brush, but we want agents chasing originations throughout the city; not merely in their submarkets assigned with arbitrary boundaries demarcated by the brokerage. Selling without the exclusive is a touchy subject as well and there is a lot of "in-between" when comparing an exclusive and an open listing to each other. At Invictus, we operate well, handling transactions with owners that are de-facto exclusives through a discrete, off-market approach. There is a skill in knowing what to pursue and what to leave alone, and we traverse this terrain well.

NYREJ: Is there a good origin story explaining how you and Josh became friends and colleagues considering the sizable age difference between you two?

Levine: Josh speaks fluent Gen Z and Gen X which is useful in our line of work. I first met Josh when I was interviewing to be his intern, and we realized we had a lot in common despite me being much younger. We both coincidentally happen to speak Russian. My mother and her family are from Moscow, and Josh worked for a transportation company and a law firm after college and law school, respectively. We also share a work ethic and vision for the future of Invictus Property Advisors. For example, we believe this business is built solely on merit and obtaining results. Early on when I

started as Josh's intern, he recognized my talent and quickly promoted me to associate, and eventually we founded Invictus together as partners. Working side-by-side, we aim to grow Invictus into a formidable mid-market brokerage.

NYREJ: Does your vision for the future of Invictus Property Advisors involve expansion?

Levine: Absolutely. We have an impressive team here, but part of the challenge for any firm managing significant growth is finding forward-thinking and hardworking people. Fortunately, we've had great success so far but it's early innings. In time, Invictus Property Advisors will introduce mortgage brokerage and retail leasing divisions. We have enlisted experienced outside recruiting to assist with our growth while we remain focused on originating and executing transactions for our clients. We are confident in our approach to training new agents and have created a path forward for them to grow from their success.

NYREJ: What is the biggest challenge facing New York City real estate investors?

Levine: New York City's biggest problem is not a new one. The risk of additional and punitive regulation is an ever-present danger to the various stakeholders in the market, including tenants. Owners were blindsided by the Tenant Protection Act of 2019, in some cases tanking the value of properties with rent-regulated assets by 30-40% overnight! A prevailing misconception is that all landlords are excessively wealthy and achieved that wealth through the crushing rents they charge tenants. The truth is more complex. Public policy and enacted regulations share much of the blame. Many landlords most impacted by recent legislation include smaller "mom and pop" owners, who are struggling with a rent roll that fails to cover expenses and debt service, let alone paying for improvements or maintenance of the building. You even have cases where tenants can go years paying no rent without consequences. I maintain that compassion and fairness towards your tenants and an expectation of rational legislation at the state and local level can—and should— co-exist. New York is and will continue to be an amazing city, but everyone needs to do their part, including legislators.

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