



IREM® From the Front Lines Podcast

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Bonus Episode

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A Look at the IREM Foundation's 2024 Impact Icon Challenge

Erin:

Welcome to another edition of From the Front Lines, where we discuss both the day-to-day, and one-of-a-kind issues facing real estate managers. In this special bonus episode of From the Front Lines, IREM Foundation's Senior Development Manager, Dana Gudel, talks to the top three IREM Foundation's 2024 Impact Icon Challenge competitors, Jim Helsel, CPM®, Lillie Norton, CPM®, ACoM®, and Rita Khan, CPM®, ACoM®. Congratulations to Jim Helsel, who earned the title of 2024 Impact Icon! The IREM Foundation Impact Icon Challenge provides an opportunity for the IREM community to raise money for those looking to earn their certification. Over to you, Dana.

Dana:

Hi everybody. Thanks so much for being here. The IREM Foundation has been supporting industry professionals for the last 48 years, but over the past several years we have seen a steady increase in demand for financial assistance, primarily in the form of scholarships. Fortunately, we had 10 incredible competitors sign up to raise critical funds from their personal networks with the goal of raising \$150,000, over the course of a 12-week competition, each vying for the title of the 2024 Impact Icon by raising the most money. The results were truly inspirational. Through donations, events, creative fundraising efforts, our competitors didn't just raise money, they sent a powerful message of encouragement and support to anyone who is looking for help. In total, the Impact Icon Challenge raised \$160,000 to support more than 150 additional scholarships to be awarded by the IREM Foundation. I'd like to welcome our top three competitors now. Hi, Jim, Lillie, and Rita. Thanks so much for being here. I'd love to go around and learn a little bit more about each of you. Can you tell us a little bit about yourselves? And Jim as our 2024 Impact Icon yourself, let's start with you.

Jim:

Thanks, Dana. Great to be here. So my background is that I am 50 years in the real estate business as of this year. I'm a past President, local and State Association of Realtors, the past president of REBI, which is another institute, society, or council, just like IREM but the National Association of Realtors. I've always had a love to help people, so anywhere I can is what I do. I help people and that's how I got in this business.

Dana:

Fantastic.

Jim:

Also being a third generation didn't hurt, but I was kind of--came naturally for me too.

Dana:

Love it. Thanks Jim. How about you, Lillie?

Lillie:

Hi, Dana. Thanks for having me. And so my name is Lillie Norton. I am in Houston. I am managing director for Lee & Associates and primarily handle office products all throughout Houston. I kind of fell into the business, so I moved my young family to Houston about 27 years ago and needed a job with a young child and kind of fell into commercial real estate. So I got started as a temporary employee and got bit by the bug as they say, and I've been in ever since.

Dana Gudel:

Okay. Rita, what about you?

Rita:

Thanks for having me, Dana. Happy to be here with Jim and Lillie. So as Dana mentioned, my name is Rita Khan. I'm the director of marketing at Hirz Law. We are a law firm that specializes in condominium homeowners association and real estate law in Michigan, as well as Illinois. I have about 15 years of experience in property management, from residential real estate to student housing. Also a faculty member at a local college and teach courses in the real estate management program.

Dana:

Fantastic. Great. Well, I'll kick off a little Q&A here and we'll go around the horn, but the first question is, how did each of your personal experiences lead you to the field of real estate management and ultimately inspire you to participate in this competition, the Impact Icon Challenge? Jim, how about you?

Jim:

Okay, so I said a few minutes ago, I think, you know I'm a third-generation realtor and third-generation commercial broker and a second-generation property manager. So I've always wanted to help people. I have always found property management to be both rewarding and quite frankly, I guess the word would probably be inspirational to me as well. So that alone made me want to get involved in the Impact Icon Challenge because it gave me an opportunity not just to give back, but to look at people who are out in the industry, who may not be able to do things the way they'd like to and see if we can help them as well. And this was an opportunity to help raise some money to do that, and that was the purpose of me getting involved.

Dana :

Wonderful. Lillie, how about you?

Lillie:

So, very similar. You know, I've been very, very fortunate in my career. I've had some great mentors. I'm following behind some people who have made it a point to help others, and I was included in that. They taught me from, you know, coming into the business as an admin and now I'm managing director and without those mentors, I wouldn't be here today. I wouldn't have had the career that I had, I would not, you know, have been able to take care of my family as I did. So being able to follow in their footsteps and watch their impact on others, and how they've given back and learned from that experience and get to come around and do it, it's just amazing. There's no better thing.

Dana:

I love that. Rita?

Rita:

So, like many others, my journey in property management began by falling into it in college, and so over the years, you know, I've seen first-hand the challenges and the opportunities that other professionals in the industry have faced every day. So as I transitioned into a leadership role, I knew that I wanted to advocate for education, for resources, and for innovation to just improve the field. However, I could also, when the Impact Icon Challenge came about, it was just a natural extension of that mission. So it provided that opportunity to be able to give back and empower the future of leaders with the tools that they need to succeed.

Dana:

Amazing. Well, like I mentioned before, the Impact Icon Challenge surpassed our goal that we set out, and we raised \$160,000. Thanks to all of our competitors. And you know you three came out on top and worked so hard to make that happen. So, I'd love to hear more about your fundraising strategy that helped you achieve your personal goals and ultimately helped us surpass that \$150,000 goal that we had. Jim?

Jim:

So my strategy is pretty easy. I sit on a couple different foundations and it's pretty easy. I go to my sphere of influence, people I know, and I ask them first, and then I ask anybody else. There's nothing magical about raising money in my head or in my mind. It's simply a matter of, you have to ask them and give them reason to understand why what you're doing is so important. And it's people like, I'll use Lillie as an example, who is on this podcast with us. Her story is so inspiring. But if it wasn't for people who were able to give her the ability to learn about property management, we wouldn't be here. She wouldn't be here, I should say. And I find that that's not only inspiring, but it's an easy ask if you tell a story like Lillie has or one that you know, maybe in your local area, I'm here in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, people will understand why they need to get involved, so my strategy is pretty simple actually. Ask the question and tell them why.

Dana:

Love it. What about you, Lillie?

Lillie:

Exactly the same. You just have to talk and tell people why it's important and how they can help and any amount helps. \$5 to \$500, doesn't matter. Just get involved. And so I did the same as Jim. I approached our industry partners in Houston. I approached, you know, other leadership folks in Houston. Our board in Houston really got behind me and helped me to raise what we were able to raise. And all of us together beat the goal. It's just outstanding. Still gives me chills.

Dana:

Rita, what about you?

Rita:

Yeah, same as Jim and Lillie. You know, my strategy was just centered around sharing my personal story and my journey with the IREM Foundation. One thing I always like to share is that in 2021, the Foundation awarded scholarships to 31% of new CPMs, and I was one of that 31%. And so being

able to say that the Foundation provided me with scholarships to get my ARM as well as my CPM just showed others that this is what happens first-hand and the impact of the contributions that they're going to make.

Dana:

Love that. Thanks for all sharing your personal stories through this journey as well. What were some of the challenges that you faced through this process through fundraising through the competition? I would love to hear what the challenges were and how you overcame them. Jim, how about you?

Jim:

My biggest challenge is getting motivated to get going. Once I get going, don't get in my way, because then I don't stop. So, I would say once I got going, my biggest challenge was making sure I was educating people in a way that they understood why the Foundation was so important to everyone else. And once I was able to educate people to the place where they understood the great work that the Foundation does for people who maybe otherwise wouldn't be able to be involved in the property management profession, asking was easy, and getting was even easier once they understood. And that's what I did. Once I educated people, that was my biggest challenge, was getting people to sit still long enough to really understand why we were doing what we were doing. Once they did, the ask became much easier.

Dana:

Love that. Lillie, how about you?

Lillie:

Yeah, I would agree. I think you know for me, part of the challenge was really explaining what the Foundation does and why it's so important, and getting people to sit still long enough to hear the story. And then once they did make that commitment, just keep following up until you see it come through. And then once it came through, you know, everybody's cheering and high-fiving and moving on to the next one. So that really was the challenge, was just keeping at it until it came across the finish line.

Rita:

Yeah, same here. As Lillie and Jim know, one of the biggest challenges was just maintaining that momentum over the course of the campaign. It was great to see everyone at Global Summit in person because then we can do that ask face-to-face and follow up with them over the course of the 3-4 days we were there. Ultimately, just educating them and knowing that every dollar raised would provide the opportunity for others just kept me motivated as well as that the long-term impact outweighed that short-term challenge.

Dana:

I love it. And you've all mentioned, you know, your personal motivations, but I would love to know how did it really feel for you to realize that you're bigger than something else, you're bigger than yourself here. You're helping others achieve their goals through this competition. I just would love to hear in your own words what that felt like. Jim?

Jim:

So I don't want to get emotional here. Helping other people is such a big part of what I want to do, that realizing I was helping other people by this process was all it took to make me want to do it more, to make me want to be better, to make me raise more funds for people in the future. It's a big part of my life. It's what I love to do. And that really made it...knowing I was helping people, it was all it took to make me want to do this. And I would say that realizing I was a part of that was...some of you didn't see me when we were at Global Summit, but I asked people when they would ask for education. I would tell them why and they can bring a tear in my eye doing that. So it was that alone made it all worthwhile.

Dana:

Beautiful. Lillie, how about you?

Lillie:

Exactly the same. It's, you know, at first it felt like a big number and especially when we got to Summit and we started seeing where we were and how close we were getting, it got really exciting. And then when we surpassed the number and we met that goal and passed the goal, it was just very emotional. I can remember looking for Jim and looking for Rita and waving and we did it and couldn't believe we did it. It's just, I can't describe it. There's no words, how it feels and to see how many scholarships that turned into. Just, the feeling doesn't go away. You just want to keep doing it and figure out how to do it again and how do we keep that goal and how do we keep surpassing the goal? It's just the best.

Dana:

Rita?

Rita:

Yeah, it was incredibly rewarding just to see that figure go up and up and up. And it wasn't stopping, and seeing the direct impact and knowing that 150 more professionals now have the access to scholarships. That's going to change the trajectory of their careers. That's just humbling. It also just reinforced the power of community and collective action in the industry. This experience was just a reminder that real change can happen when people come together. As IREM President Dawn Carpenter says, we are better together.

Dana:

I love it. And Lillie, to your point, like now, we look ahead, right? And how do each of you plan on continuing to build upon the ideas and the strategies that you've developed through this challenge to just continue to create that lasting change that we want to see in the real estate industry and the communities that we serve? So, Jim, what's next for you?

Jim:

Well, when I think about doing this again this year and I want to be involved and you know that I think about all the things I learned while I was doing it last year, I think about the fun I had too. I knew that there were people chasing my numbers, and I know I was chasing their numbers and we didn't know who was ahead and who was behind, but that alone made me work harder. I also learned a little bit about how to educate people more quickly so that I can move on to the next person, but you can't be so quick that you run by them and they don't understand or hear what you're saying. So my strategy this year will be similar. Ask and educate and ask the questions. But it will also be to remember to take my time to really make people understand how wonderful and

how good this Foundation is, and that I'm going to weave that more into my conversation this year than I did last year.

Dana:

Great. How about you, Lillie? What's next?

Lillie:

Yeah. So we're already talking about it in Houston. We've got a couple of people who are interested in doing the challenge this year if it returns. And so my main goal is really just education, very similar to what Jim was saying. Make sure people know what the Foundation does, how it serves the people, you know, all of those details, and then kind of tackle it as a team again. Because whether we're doing the challenge or not, the fundraising is absolutely crucial and important. So I want to keep that going through the Houston board and the Houston members and industry partners regardless of if we're doing a challenge, keep that coming in and keep getting people educated and moving forward in their career.

Dana:

Great. Rita, what about you?

Rita:

Same here. As Jim and Lillie both mentioned, just continuing to advocate for mentorships, professional development, providing access to resources for all real estate professionals. I think we just need to continue to build that culture of giving back and asking, creating ongoing initiatives and just you know whether that's through scholarships, industry events or just thought leadership. We just kind of continue to have that momentum keep going.

Dana:

Love it. Well, I've got one more question for you. What kind of tips or tricks would you give to fellow IREM members who also want to give back and support industry professionals, whether it's through the Impact Icon Challenge or elsewhere? What would you have to say to them? Jim?

Jim :

Not everybody's a fund-raiser is the first thing, but everybody has something in their bag of tools that can help other professionals that can bring other people to the table. Either through thought leadership or through giving back to other parts of the IREM world that we all live in. Through property management, things at your local level that will make you a better person, a better property manager, and will help our profession long-term. But you have to be willing to give back. First thing I said to everybody is find a place, what you like that you like within IREM. Join that group and make yourself happy because that'll make other people happy while you're doing it too.

Dana:

Love it. What about you, Lillie?

Lillie:

Jim is so right. I think there's so many different ways that you can give back. You just have to jump in. It can be anything from being a greeter at an IREM event to a new person, a new member who's never been there before, you know, making everybody feel welcome and involved talking about how they can get involved in the different committees that they could join. To find themselves something that they can do, I think just jump in. It doesn't matter if it's fundraising.

If it's, you know, volunteering for one of the committees or one of the events, it doesn't matter, just jump in.

Dana:

Love it. How about you, Rita?

Rita:

Yes, as Jim and Lillie both mentioned, you know, definitely start with your strengths. Everyone has a unique way that they can contribute. It's just figuring out what it is and doing it, whether it's through fundraising, mentorship, advocacy, education. You just want to find what aligns with your skills and your passions and not being afraid to ask, like, if you need help, just ask. There's always someone that's going to be able to help you or you help them, and small efforts add up to big impact.

Dana:

Wonderful. Well, I would like to say from the bottom of our hearts, the IREM Foundation thanks you so much. Over the 12-week competition, your passion and determination and generosity have been nothing short of inspiring. Your efforts are more than just numbers like we've shared today. They're hope and transformation and opportunity for so many. So thank you, you three, and to all of our Impact Icon competitors. The IREM Foundation is excited to once again be hosting the Impact Icon Challenge this year. If you or anyone you know is interested in joining this year's challenge, please feel free to reach out to myself, Dana Gudel at dgudel, that's dgudel@irem.org. Thank you once again for joining us, Jim, Lillie, and Rita.

Lillie:

Thank you, Dana.

Jim:

Thank you.

Rita:

Thank you.

Erin:

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