



**SUCCESS SET IN STONE**  
A young entrepreneur in Miami tells how he has grown a distribution business that could hit \$20 million in sales, while ensuring that he keeps a solid relationship with his successful father. **P18**

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How to use a flash report to help navigate a company **P24**



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## SET IN STONE

### Young leader builds multimillion-dollar business

BY KEVIN GALE

**F**lying solo didn't work out so badly, after all, for Eric Schigiel. His father had bought several buildings along the Palmetto Expressway in Doral, and a would-be business associate suggested he buy some Turkish marble and get in the stone business.



Schigiel

After two months, the marble expert split, partly because of economic jitters in the wake of Sept. 11, said Eric Schigiel, who stepped in, despite being only 23. "He took this business and built it what it is today," his father, Leo, said.

The business, called Opustone, now sprawls across 107,000 square feet with a sleek-looking 10,000-square-foot showroom and has opened a second location in Jacksonville.

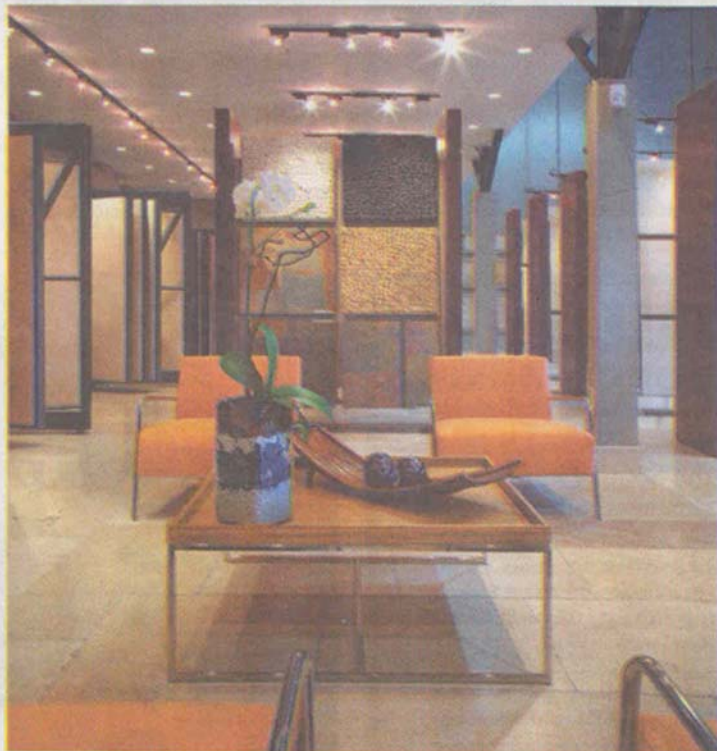
Founder and VP Eric Schigiel said the 72-employee company sells about 115 shipping containers of stone a month, and hopes to hit \$20 million in revenue this year with a net margin near 10 percent.

Leo Schigiel has been a mentor without getting involved in day-to-day operations, Eric Schigiel said. "He has asked me many times: 'Eric let me help, let me help.' But I know I have such a good relationship that I don't want to ruin it by having him come in and be involved in day-to-day operation. I would not be able to work with my father. My personality is too strong. We're almost identical."

Leo Schigiel, who is president, uses the phrase "almost identical," as well, adding: "We get along as father and son great, but when it comes to business, I don't push him. I wait. When he needs me, he calls me."

#### GENERATIONS OF SUCCESS

Eric Schigiel is the third generation of his family to make a success out of business in Miami. His late grandfather, Isaac, lost eight siblings in the Holocaust, fled Cuba after Fi-



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del Castro came to power and ran jewelry stores in New York City, Leo Schigiel said. He moved to Miami in 1962 and operated Sunshine Jewelry and Latin American Jewelry.

Leo Schigiel developed Inteuro Parts Distributors, which had revenue of \$28.4 million when he and a partner sold it to Keystone Automotive Industries (NASDAQ: KEYS) in 1997. Subsequently, he has been a successful developer and real estate investor, notably selling a home on Miami Beach's La Gorce Island to singer Billy Joel for \$13.5 million in 2006.

Before Opustone, Eric Schigiel had double-majored in finance and international business at FIU, with no idea he'd ever get into the marble and granite business.

#### OPUSTONE GRANITE & MARBLE DISTRIBUTORS

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Address: 3200 N.W. 77th Court, Miami 33122  
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#### THE YOUNG BOSS

An initial challenge was his age. Even six years later, at age 29, he says: "Most of my employees are older than me. I probably have four or five that are younger than me."

His advice on coping with that is to treat everyone with respect.

"I get that from my father - that everybody

#### THE CHALLENGES

- Learning a new business quickly
- Overcoming the stigma of being a young business owner
- Preventing a business relationship from spoiling a father-son relationship

#### LESSONS LEARNED

- Employees help your business grow and should be treated with respect.
- Don't get stressed out over all the details.
- Travel to distant suppliers and learn from them.
- Build a reputation for trustworthiness with clients.

is equal. Just because you own a business, you don't treat anybody less. You respect them because they are helping you to grow."

He traveled to learn about his products. "I would pick everyone's brain. I would travel to the countries of origin - Turkey, Spain, Israel, China, Egypt, Italy," he said.

#### DON'T SWEAT THE SMALL STUFF

He struggled with stress at the beginning, saying his short fuse could make it difficult on others. He can still worry about things, but tries not to sweat the small stuff.

He operates with several rules in mind, including keeping promises to customers to build repeat business and having a lot of inventory on hand.

Willy Gomez, a senior VP at Mellon United National Bank, said Schigiel is serious, driven, a quick learner and a hard worker.

Gomez, who knows the elder Schigiel, as well, said he knows how challenging it is for the offspring of a successful entrepreneur to rise to the same level.

"I always tell his dad he should be very proud of Eric."