

# Paul F. Berlin, CLU

**I**t takes a wildly successful maverick to "wing it" as an insurance agent and manage to accumulate \$250,000 a year in first-year commissions by the age of 30.

Paul F. Berlin's only plan in life is to be a success. While most agents are taught to plan their work and work their

plan, Berlin eschews attempts at time control. "I don't do any of that," he says. "I wing it. If somebody calls and wants to see me at 10 in the morning, I go at 10 in the morning."

For Berlin, winging it is an attitude. "I can't sit down and read a book cover to cover; I don't have the patience," he explains. "I've never had a file card system like you're taught to have. I like to

do my own thing. I don't like being told what to do. And as long as I keep producing, I'm doing the right thing."

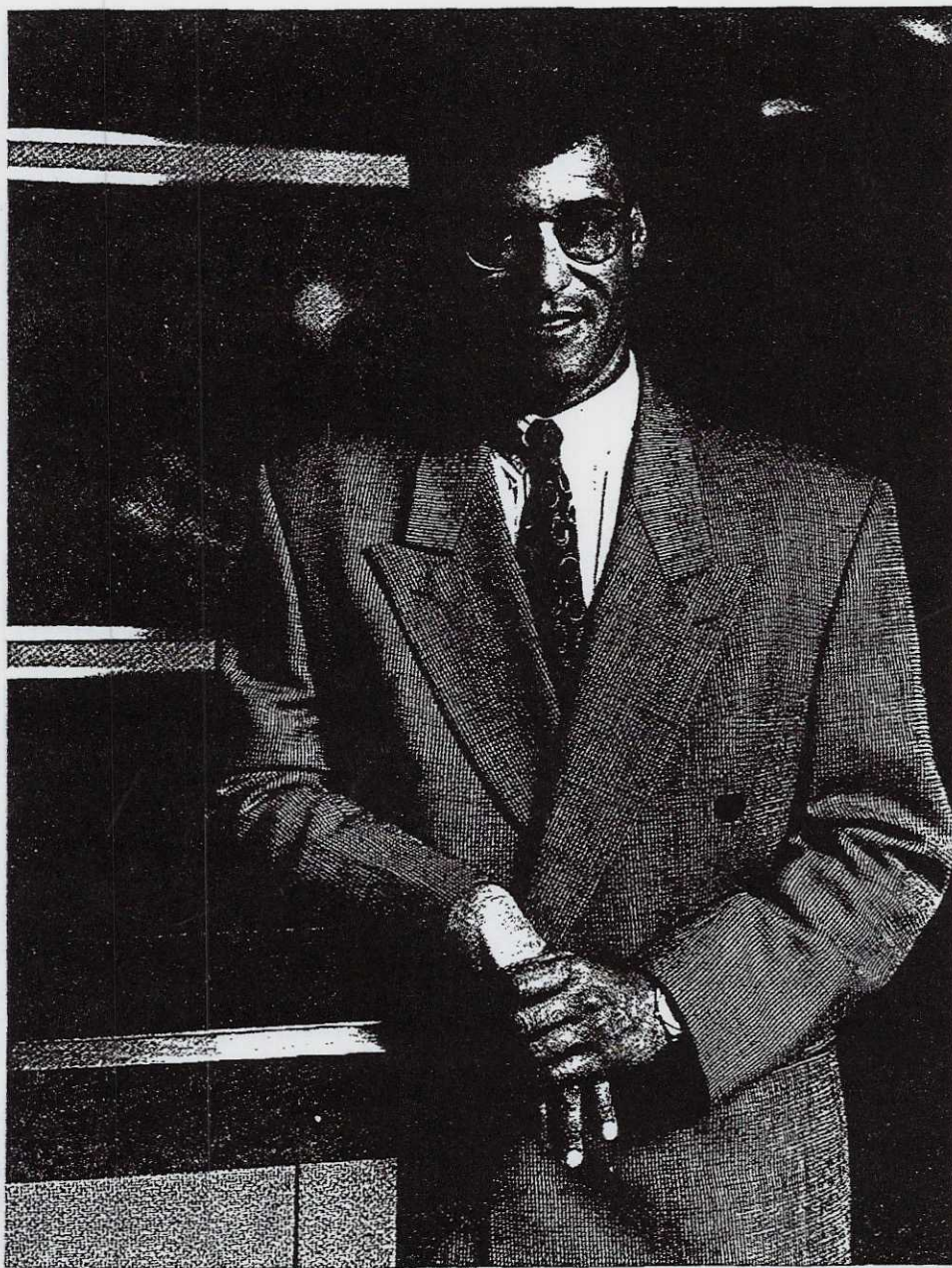
Planning leads to worry, Berlin says, and he'd rather do without the worry, thank you. "As my income keeps going up, I don't worry. I have very little planned except for what I'm going to do next week. It always works itself out," he says. It's a testament to Berlin's style that his income has increased every year since he entered the business in 1982.

A graduate of the Indiana University School of Business where he majored in business and finance, Berlin always knew that he wanted to make his living in the financial world; he just didn't know insurance would be the vehicle. "I was always business-minded," he explains. "I went into college knowing I was going to go into business, I just didn't know I was going into the insurance business."

## SWEET-TALKED INTO SELLING

The father of a good friend who was an agent with Equitable believed Berlin had the makings of a good insurance agent. "He said, 'You're personable. You love people. You're smart. Selling insurance would be a good business for you.' So that's what happened." Berlin says he walked into the Equitable office, signed his contract and, in his first six months, was their top young agent earning \$25,000 in first-year commissions.

"That's when I knew insurance was *it*," he says. "The first thing I learned when I came into the business was the knowledge of present value, future value and rates of return." This was vital knowledge, Berlin says, because at that time, the early 1980s, variable and universal life started to come into play. "I sold everything based on rates of return. Now, a lot of the





industry does that, but I had a real good grasp of that from day one."

Berlin says the insurance industry fit him like a glove. Armed with his business smarts he played to his inside information when it came to selling. Because his father was a physician he knew about the financial problem most doctors were concerned about — disability income (DI).

He clipped and copied an article on DI coverage from *Medical Economics* magazine, the bible, he says, of the medical profession, and mailed it to a couple hundred doctors in his area. Then he made follow-up calls. This helped him net \$40,000 in first-year commissions his first full year in the business.

#### **HIS OWN PERSONAL SOOTHSAYER**

His initial success wasn't enough to convince him to stay in the business, however. It took the seemingly clairvoyant skills of a past president of the Million Dollar Round Table, Millard J. Grauer, CLU, to convince Berlin he was in the right profession. "I was friends with Millard," recalls Berlin. "One day he said, 'Ten years from now, you'll be making X-amount of dollars,' and he was right. Then he said 'Fifteen years from now, you'll be making double that.' Knock on wood, I hope he's right."

Grauer made Berlin realize that selling insurance is a profession, not a job. "Once you go to a Top of the Table meeting and see four hundred other guys in the room making seven digits or more a year, you realize it's an elite group of guys that really control this business."

That elite group was another reason Berlin decided to stick with the insurance business. "I've always been money-oriented," he says. "I come from an affluent family and I like nice things. I appreciate quality, and one of my goals was to be among the stars of the business."

Although Berlin admits that a certain amount of luck has played a role

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**Company affiliation:** Executive Planning, Inc.  
**Age:** 30  
**Years in business:** 9  
**1991 first-year commissions:** \$250,000+  
**1991 number of lives:** 50  
**Hometown:** Chicago, Ill.  
**Industry honors:** MDRT, 9 years; Top of the Table, 2 years; National Quality Award; National Sales Achievement Award  
**Main market:** estate planning and business  
**Main products:** high cash value products and second-to-die policies  
**Local association:** Chicago Association of Life Underwriters  
**Insurance role model:** Millard J. Grauer, CLU, MDRT past president  
**Family:** wife, Judy; daughter, Stephanie; son Brett  
**Hobbies:** golf, tennis, racquetball and volunteer work with the Jewish United Fund  
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in his success, it's not something he advises agents to rely on. He recommends a strong educational base with structured programs like those offered by the Life Underwriter Training Council and the Chartered Life Underwriter degree. Of more importance, however, is constant reading to keep current, and joint work for valuable experience.

"The most important piece of knowledge an agent can gain is to learn how to ask questions and not be scared about it," he explains. "I call our advanced underwriting guy once or twice a week to ask him technical questions about drafting trusts or whatever

## **Future Legends**

I need. I'm not scared to pick up the phone. That's where my real learning comes into play."

He emphasizes that the best learning comes from hands-on experience. "You've got to start somewhere," he says. "An agent just coming into the business needs to associate himself with someone who's been doing it eight or 10 years. Joint work is more important than reading any type of book."

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—Paul F. Berlin, CLU

Success means taking the initiative in your own education, according to Berlin. "You've got to want to learn, especially at a young age," he says. "It's hard for an individual who's 27 to go into a multi-millionaire's office and tell him what he needs to have done. Why would a 55-year-old who's made millions of dollars want to listen to a 27-year-old? You have to show him that you know a little bit more about insurance than he does."

Joining your local life underwriters association is a must, Berlin says. "You get a constant flow of information and constant people to talk to. If you don't do it, you don't care about the business. You need to be part of it."

In the end, however, it's not who you know or what you join, Berlin says, it's how you treat people as you travel your road to success. "When people see me, I want them to say 'There's a good, honest, insurance producer who is smart and really did it on his own.' It's important that people realize that I don't cheat them. I give them what I feel is a fair value and good advice. And I expect them to buy from me."

—Chuck Jones

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