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Orthodox finalist on 'Apprentice' hopes he is the one Trump hires

By Steven I. Weiss

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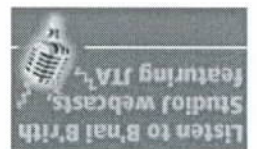
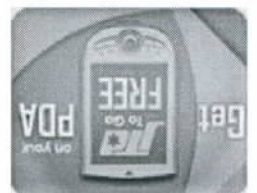
Bienstock began the season with another Orthodox Jew in tow — New Jersey's Dan Brody. The two observed Rosh Hashanah together early in the season — missing the third episode's task — but only Bienstock stayed in the show long enough to observe Yom Kippur, missing another task.

While some of Bienstock's teammates wanted his religious observance to get him fired from the show, Trump would not have it. When Bienstock was brought back to "the boardroom" — where Trump announces who from a given episode is fired — after the Yom Kippur episode, Trump told the team leader "I think it's terrible that you brought Lee back" to the boardroom as a potential fire for having missed the task due to religious observances, and fired the team leader instead.

Other elements of Bienstock's religious observance didn't make it into the show. For instance, the availability of kosher food in a special mini-fridge, and any other religious practices maintained by Bienstock.

Now, with Bienstock one of only two contestants left, his family and friends are already celebrating. "They're having a hometown party for him during the show, during the live show, and it'll be at the firehouse," said his father, Mark Bienstock, in an interview with JTA. The Bienstocks' Long Island home has hosted weekly watching parties with an "open door" — through which sometimes hundreds of attendees have passed. "Apprentice" parties are a weekly affair at Cornell University, where Bienstock graduated with a 4.0 two years ago and at the University of Pennsylvania, where his brother Daniel is a junior.

Bienstock grew up in the New York area, attending Orthodox schools until college. He graduated from the Hebrew Academy of the Five Towns and Rockaway after spending his last two years of high school there, and was class president for much of his tenure at the Yeshiva of Flatbush from third through 10th grades.



"He's always been an outgoing kid, and he likes to be involved in many things," said his father. In college, Bienstock served as an officer for Cornell's Hillel.

Bienstock's gregariousness and loyalty are the characteristics most cited by friends, and have been a consistent theme in his success on the show. Trump has cited Bienstock's loyalty approvingly, and fired two of the final four candidates for their lack of loyalty.

Stories of praise from his friends often center around his willingness to literally go the extra mile for people.

"One of our friends got stuck on the highway an hour outside of Cornell, so he just drove and picked her up and her stuff and drove her down to Washington," recalled friend Adam Enbar, adding "he's just always there for you."

Other stories mention his work with the disadvantaged. Enbar worked with Bienstock at a counseling center for the mentally disabled. He says that because Bienstock has such an outgoing personality, the two would get jobs that involved interacting directly with the clients.

Bienstock's father recalled that when his son volunteered to teach math to inner-city public school students, he had each student read problems aloud. One student was reluctant to read. Eventually, Bienstock discovered that the student didn't know how to read, so "for the rest of the year, Lee spent time with him teaching him how to read, and he made great strides."

Whether Bienstock will become the next apprentice will in large part depend on his performance in the finale, and the blog that has tracked his progress, Orthodox Apprentice — <http://orthodoxapprentice.blogspot.com> — isn't optimistic so far.

"Lee appears to have a very weak team," the blogger wrote. "In meetings with the executives, they show no creativity, few ideas, minimal teamwork and no leadership."

Family and friends are urging fans to vote for Bienstock on the Internet in NBC's poll, which Trump has indicated he'll take into account in his decision. They've set up a Web site for the task, <http://www.vote4lee.com>.

Whether or not Bienstock wins Monday night, he can already rely on some measure of success. Bienstock has been approached with numerous speaking opportunities from various commercial outlets and Jewish communal organizations, and his religious observances on national television won't soon be forgotten.

But while he'd surely be a hot item at any Jewish organization's bachelor auction, he's already succeeded at finding love. He's been dating Sara Steinberg, a 21-year-old junior at New York University, for 10 months and, Steinberg says, "we're very, very happy together."

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