

# The Hardest Working Man in the Room

*Million Dollar Listing New York's* Ryan Serhant opens up about his rise to the top

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PHOTO CREDIT: ALEX ABAUNZA

I am waiting for Ryan Serhant in his real estate office's conference room. The small room boasts a conference table as well as a console table and two bookshelves brimming with a mélange of books, framed photos and editorials, real estate awards, and memorabilia, like an autographed poster of *The Wolf of Wall Street*, Ryan bobbleheads, and mugs with the catchphrase: "Expansion. Always, in all Ways." Beyond the glass walls, I spy several stacks of Ryan's book, *Sell It Like Serhant: How to Sell More, Earn More, and Become the Ultimate Sales Machine* and his credo framed: The Serhant Team Way: We Take Initiative. We are Relentless. We have Empathy. We Respect.

After a few minutes, the former soap actor/hand model-turned-reality star/real estate agent extraordinaire walks in, pulls up a chair, and gets comfortable. The 6'3" realtor scrunches up his legs and rests his loafers on the edge of the seat between us—a bold move considering he is wearing *fitted* suit pants (bright blue) paired with a crisp white button-up, and a light pink tie. Ryan just returned to New York City from Greece, where he celebrated his birthday, his wife Emilia's birthday, the 4th of July, his wedding anniversary, and had his daughter, Zena, baptized. "Efficient with time," Ryan says with a smile. Though admittedly *slightly* jet lagged, he doesn't look it.

Ryan, who was born in Houston, Texas and raised in Topsfield, Massachusetts, studied theater his whole life and always thought he would be an actor. After high school, he attended Hamilton College in New York, then moved to New York City to pursue acting. Not long after relocating to the city, Ryan landed the role of Evan Walsh on the soap opera, *As the World Turns* (2007-2008). “And then, I ran out of money. I was going to go home to Colorado or go get my master’s —just continue the process— and a friend told me to get into real estate and I just fell in love with it the minute I got into it. I talk about there being a lack of control [as a realtor], but as an actor in New York City, you have complete lack of control.”

Ryan has been working as a real estate agent since 2008, but it wasn’t until 2010, when he was cast on Bravo’s *Million Dollar Listing New York*, that his career really took off. “I went to an open casting call with 3,000 brokers in Times Square in March of 2010. The show was me, Michael Lorber, and Fredrik [Eklund]. I was basically doing rentals beforehand. I’ve grown my entire business with the show as it has grown.”

This August, *Million Dollar Listing New York* returns to Bravo for season eight and Ryan tells me that it’s the greatest season yet. “I’ve got a baby. Steve Gold had a baby out of the blue. Fredrik is moving to Los Angeles. Luis came back from Paris, out of retirement. This season is going to be the most visceral and intense season that, I think, we’ve ever had by far because the market is so up and down,” he says animatedly. “It’s not just going to be like, ‘Yay! We got a listing. Let’s sell it, cool,’ and show beautiful properties. We’ll still have that, but you’ll also see the market crashing around us, prices tanking, sellers taking losses of millions of dollars to get things sold —the real struggles that New Yorkers are going through to sell property right now. We have the same situation in Miami, where there’s a significant amount of condos to sell in Miami, but less buyers to buy them.”

*Million Dollar Listing New York* has certainly helped Ryan’s career, but it takes more than being on a reality TV show to become the #1 real estate team in New York and among the top 5 real estate teams in the nation. He works arduously to separate himself from the pack, noting that NYC alone has about 80,000 realtors. This no-days-off guy credits his immense success to staying in touch with everyone he has ever met as much as he possibly can, and the utilization of every resource available to him, including, social media (especially YouTube, Instagram, etc.), press, multiple outlets for sales, and his book.

“I’ve grown a significant network of clients and developers and used all of them to help propel the business. I learned early on, success in any business, but especially in sales, is driven by your focus on new business. 90% of my day is focused on new business, 10% is doing the best with the business that we have —I have a team that helps me with that. I think the discipline that I had growing up, that I really resented and hated, has paid off for me in this business by a lot, because you have to be self-disciplined to be an entrepreneur,” says Ryan.

Over the last decade, he has built a highly lucrative and recognizable brand that grows more and more each year. In addition to filming *Million Dollar Listing*, Ryan is working on his second book, producing a vlog, growing his team in all markets, selling as much as possible, releasing a real estate course this month, and enjoying time with his family.

**How do you balance it all? What is a typical day for you like?**

I wake up at 5 am. I answer emails from overnight. I deal with any phone calls with clients that are in Europe or Asia at that time, partly because they’re always appreciative that I call them earlier than anyone else in the country. I go to the gym for an hour. I come home, shower, get dressed, go to work. I have a driver that takes me around, I basically live in the

backseat of that car. I’m booked on the half hour, for the most part, throughout the entire day, Monday through Friday anyway. I try to start in the office and end my day in the office, but the days are random, different appointments, different pitches. I’ll be either filming or I’ll vlog or I’ll be working on book number two or I’ll be working on the course. Then, I’ll have a dinner or an event or two. I’ll get home and if my wife and baby are there, I’ll say hi to them or kiss them —they’ll be sleeping. Clean up email from the day. I get on average, somewhere between 900-1,100 emails that I have to respond to —I have an email assistant who helps me with that. I also have five other separate assistants that help me with the rest of the work. I prep my day ahead, that way when I wake up the next morning, I’m not already playing catch-up like most people are going to do.

**Wow, what time are you going to sleep?**

Between 11 pm -12 am.

**That is a very busy day. I think that is one of the busiest days I’ve heard.**

As a real estate agent, there’s so much you have to do personally. It’s a lot of work, but it’s what I chose to do. There are times, I will say, when things get a little bit slower, and I don’t know, I lose my mind. Unfortunately, I am now a product of my environment. I am so addicted to it, so as crazy as it might be, as tired as I might get sometimes, I need it. It’s like a drug in a way. I think New York does that to you as well.

**You’re sitting there like, I need to be doing something. Can you Netflix & chill?**

Sometimes, yeah. Although, the problem now is we have all these great shows I try to watch, but I’m always on my phone and I don’t even know what happened. I’d love to watch *Stranger Things*, but I don’t even know what happened the last season. Pretty sure I was just doing emails the whole time.

“I just focus on being a good, hard-working person, instead of having an overbearing personality. I think that’s why we do so many different types of deals. Like, I am not a broker who is known for just doing 10-million-dollar overheads. We do deals from \$300,000 to \$50 million, between East New York to the Hamptons to Miami to Los Angeles to Harlem. For me, it’s just always been about volume. We want to sell as much as possible. I don’t really care if it’s the guy with the crazy motorcycle, who is going to drive me totally crazy, to try to sell that thing over the course of a year for \$18 million or over the next two weeks, I can sell 18 one-million-dollar apartments in Brooklyn. None of those people are going to drive me crazy, they’re all super excited about their homes.”

### What is your biggest challenge as a realtor?

Your complete and utter lack of any control, whatsoever. My life is dictated by everyone else's decisions. I think anyone can say that, but at least other people's jobs have a salary. You know you do good work, you'll get promoted —there are systems in place. As a real estate agent, there are no systems. I have deals that live and die based on what people say on FOX News. If the stock market goes down a hundred points, buyers pull out of deals because they're so nervous that 2008 is happening again. There's an unbelievable amount of competition and there's no way to control any part of this business. So what you do is you try to control yourself and the way you attack the business as much as you possibly can, so that you can stay happy and stay motivated.

### What philosophy do you live by?

Expansion has always kinda been my quote. Expansion always and always in all things in life. Always do more. That's my biggest fear, wasted potential. When I was a little kid, we were driving in the car and my grandfather pointed to a cemetery and he said, 'In that cemetery are probably the greatest basketball player in the world, the greatest trumpeter in the world, the greatest author in the world, and no one will ever know it because they just didn't try hard enough to pull out their talents.' And that, for some reason, my grandfather was an intense guy, really, really sat with me. There's so much we can do with the time that we have and life is so short, it just seems like such a waste to Netflix and chill.

### What is your most memorable listing?

My most memorable listings are the weirdest ones. We filmed it. 61 West 62nd Street Harmony House on the Upper West Side was this big, crazy, multi-unit combination and it was completely renovated to be like a Gothic Spanish church on the inside, which in the very Jewish enclave of the Upper West Side was a super tricky sale. It also had hooks and things for



sex swings and had been used for many a fun party. That was one of the most memorable listings because that was one where you walk in and you're like: I don't think staging is just going to do it. I don't think we can just paint this. This is going to be interesting. It was hard. We sold it to somebody who completely gut renovated it.

### What do you think people would be surprised to find out about you?

I'm far shyer than I think I put myself out there as on *Million Dollar Listing* 'cause my character as a real estate agent has to be very aggressive, right? Every single episode, I'm always doing a party, all over the place, even the vlog, and the way people know me —but I am uncomfortable in crowds. When I tell people that, I think they still don't believe me.

### Any summer plans?

I was just in Greece, now I work. I was working there, too. I go back to Greece in August to see my wife and baby, so that she'll grow up knowing she has a father. We're renovating a townhouse in Brooklyn that we'll move to in a year, so it's just staying on top of the renovation.

### What is your favorite place you've ever been?

Probably New Zealand. It is unlike anywhere else I've ever been because it's so different. It's kinda like two islands that make New Zealand and the north is so different from the south. You go to the south island and you look this way, this way, this way, it's like you're looking in four different countries. This is a beach, this is like rocky mountains with snow-capped covers, this is the amazon jungle, and this is something totally different. It's completely crazy. There's also no bugs, no animals, no disease —nothing was ever brought there. It's a pretty wild place with amazing food, amazing wine, and good people. **ML**

Follow Ryan on IG, Facebook, and Twitter: @RyanSerhant  
For more on his real estate course, visit <https://ryanserhant.com/course>