

AUTHOR WHO MIXES HIGH FINANCE WITH THE WORLD OF COMEDY

That's rich! Jeff tells how to succeed in business - thanks to a little bit of fraud



BY SIMON YAFFE

FINANCIAL misdemeanours have dominated the newspaper headlines in the past few months.

British MPs were lambasted for fraudulent expenses' claims, while crooked businessman Bernard Madoff was sentenced this week to 150 years in prison for swindling billions of dollars from charities and individuals.

But a new book teaches people how to get ahead in business - through fraud.

However, Jeff Kreisler's *Get Rich Cheating* is purely tongue in cheek.

American political comedian and writer Jeff told the *Jewish Telegraph*: "It is a satirical look at making money - it is a spoof."

But one gullible woman in San Francisco did not take too kindly to him.

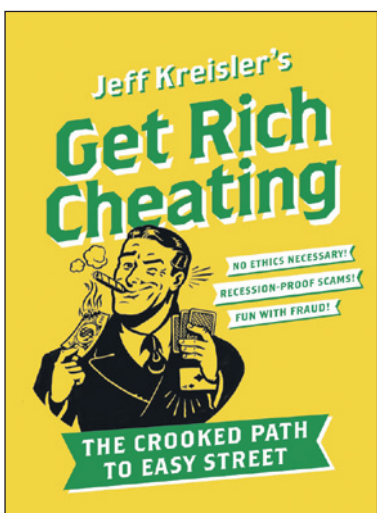
He recalled: "I was doing a book signing and gave a talk.

"A woman came up to me afterwards and told me that I should be ashamed of myself - I took it as a compliment."

Jeff, who is in his 30s, is heading to the Edinburgh Festival next month, two years after making his debut there.

He said: "I did my own solo show in 2007. That was an hour of stand-up and last year I performed a sitcom called *The Americans* with two other comedians."

New York City-based Jeff said his show *Get Rich Cheating: East*



JEFF'S BOOK: Tongue in cheek

To Edinburgh is an adaptation of his book.

Born in Northampton, Massachusetts, of Russian, Polish and Austrian descent, Jeff's father Michael was a scientist at nearby Amherst College.

Dad's job took the family to the French side of Lake Geneva, before they moved back to America.

Jeff read politics and economics at Princeton University and later read law at the University of Virginia.

He explained: "I am the youngest member of the family - that is probably what drove me into comedy.

"I have always been culturally and politically aware.

"I lean to the left politically, but that is probably because we

recently came out of an extreme-right government in America."

After completing his law degree, he taught English in Russia before moving to San Francisco, which is where he started his fledgling comedy career.

He said: "San Francisco has a big comedy tradition.

"I could have gone to Los Angeles or New York, but Cisco did not have the industrial pressure of those places.

"People were more creative there and open-minded."

Jeff started off performing at open-mic nights at coffee shops and comedy clubs. He built up his act before going to live in New York City six years ago.

"For me, New York has a lot more going on politically and culturally," Jeff added. "It inspires me more than Los Angeles - it is not just about showbusiness here."

And Jeff likes to bring an intellectual edge to his comedy. He said: "I am interested in interacting with the audience. I never focus on myself in my act. I like to be outward looking during my show."

Described as "passionate, energetic, magnetic, opinionated, and, above all, extremely funny", he wrote a humorous business column for website Street.com, before being approached by publishers HaperCollins to write a book.

He recalled: "I read the business pages of every newspaper every day for four years.

"I read about chief executives receiving million dollar pay-offs.

"Scandals such as those and

parliamentary expenses are mentioned in the book."

Jeff reckons his religion has played a part in shaping his career.

He continued: "Being brought up Jewish, my barmitzvah was essentially my first stand-up performance - and it was in another language.

"I think Judaism gives you a creative intellectualism - it is a very intellectual religion.

"We were not a religious family, but we celebrated the High Holy Days and my paternal grandfather was a part-time rabbi."

His wife Anne is Catholic and he is planning to bring up his children in both religions.

"They will be CathJews," he laughed.

A cast member on *Shoot The Messenger*, a new show from the creator of *The Daily Show with Jon Stewart* and a winner of the Bill Hicks Spirit Award for Thought Provoking Comedy, Jeff recently became editor of the online parody *My Wall Street Journal*.

He explained: "Rupert Murdoch took over *The Wall Street Journal*,

which had always been a respected, serious, broadsheet newspaper.

"We are basically lampooning Murdoch and his tabloid style."

A self-confessed fan of Barack Obama, he admits that no political system is perfect, but is optimistic for America's future.

Jeff said: "I hope everything turns out well and the country manages to pull itself out of the hole we are in.

"At the moment, we are just muddling along as best we can."

A fan of Steve Martin, Bill Hicks, George Carlin and Lenny Bruce, Jeff said he prefers playing comedy gigs in the UK rather than in America.

He added: "It is definitely easier to communicate with the audience in the UK.

"There is a tradition in American comedy clubs for audience members to have their own table and drinks' waitress - so they become easily distracted and don't concentrate on what is being said."

Jeff's Edinburgh show starts at the 455 Stand Comedy Club on August 7 and runs until August 30. Visit: www.jeffkreisler.com

JEFF KREISLER FACTFILE

BORN: Northampton, Massachusetts
EDUCATED: Princeton University and the University of Virginia
FAMILY: Parents Barbara and Michael, wife Anne, brother David and sister Michelle
HOME: New York City
AUTHOR: *Jeff's Kreisler's Get Rich*

Cheating, writer for Comedy Central, blogs for 236.com, and *The Huffington Post*, executive editor of *My Wall Street Journal*

AWARDS: Bill Hicks Spirit Award for Thought Provoking Comedy
HOBBIES: Reading and long walks

ASK THE RABBI

Rabbi Chaim Kanterovitz is minister of the Yeshurun Hebrew Congregation, Gatley, Cheshire

Q I HEARD recently of a case where someone heavily in debt cajoled a family member into embezzling a large amount of funds from the bank at which they worked by threatening suicide.

The family member, genuinely fearing for the life of the relative, did commit fraud and handed the money over.

Is this behaviour ever allowed, especially since it could save a life?

A IT seems as if every day we hear of fraud on a massive scale taking place all over the world.

It boggles the mind to think of the victims of these schemes and their families.

It is important to feel their pain and torment as a

Dare we commit crime to save a life?



Rabbi Chaim Kanterovitz

result of these unscrupulous individuals who are no more than fancy crooks.

The principle that applies to such a case is that of *ain omrim laadam chato kdei sheyezakeh lechavero* ("we do not ask a fellow to sin in order to redeem one's friend").

The case which is, in fact, one of the first discussed in tractate *Shabbat* (4: a) speaks of a situation whereby one is required to transgress a rabbinical prohibition (a less severe sin) in order to prevent a fellow

Jew from transgressing a sin of biblical nature (which is far more severe).

Thus the *poskim* (*halachic* authorities) opined that where a fellow Jew threatened suicide and there is a definite case of *pikuach nefesh* (threat to one's life) transgressing the Shabbat in order to save his life would be permitted - or even obligated.

There have been cases throughout our rich history from which we may learn a ruling.

A source called *Eitz Chayim* (around 17th century), quoting the opinion of the sages of Amsterdam, relates the following episode:

A man diagnosed as terminally ill by doctors was

given only one chance for survival.

If he were to drink the milk of a donkey it would make him well again. The man refused on the grounds that it is not a kosher drink.

Now, from a *halachic* perspective, this man is being foolish because one is not only permitted to drink such milk but rather obligated to do so if this would - or could - save one's life.

The man's son, trying to get his obstinate father to drink of the milk, brought him a glass of donkey milk, claiming that it was cow's milk.

The father, who was ill but not a complete imbecile, informed the son that he would drink the milk if

the son would drink some of it first!

The son was caught between a rock and a hard place. Could he drink some non-kosher milk in order to get his father to do so as well and thus possibly save his life?

The sages of Amsterdam ruled that it was prohibited for the son to transgress in order to save the father's life, even though the father was obligated to drink the non-kosher milk in the first place!

Another point in case: Rav Dovid Tzvi Hoffman in his classic *Melamed Lehoil* (19th century) was asked:

A non-observant Jewess wished for her son to attend the local secular school known as the Gym-

nasium. The observant son refused on the grounds that were he to do so he would be required to desecrate Shabbat.

The mother, in response, threatened that if he were not to attend she would commit suicide.

Rav Hoffman ruled that the son is not permitted to desecrate the Shabbat even under these difficult circumstances.

Although there are many more examples to look at and study, one who finds himself in such a situation must approach a *halachically* competent rav for guidance.

But a clear pattern has emerged. The behaviour of the family member was wrong - even when faced with the very real threat of suicide.

Indeed, it was very wrong - and it was against the Torah!