

Man, 96, Shares His 'Biggest Career Mistake'—and It's Eye-Opening

Soo Kim, Life & Trends Reporter • Published Jun 17, 2025 at 10:26 AM EDT

Ninety-six-year-old Marty Friedman has spent decades in an industry he never imagined he'd be in as a teenager fresh out of high school. His journey—from an optometrist disillusioned by a lack of appreciation to a thriving businessman in the appliance world—is not just a tale of reinvention but a viral sensation, thanks to his granddaughter.

In a [TikTok](#) video shared by Izzi Friedman ([@izzifriedmann](#)), the grandfather reflects on his career journey. Text overlaid on the clip, which shows him standing outdoors in a backyard setting, says: "My 96-year-old grandpa on his biggest career mistake." The video has amassed a million views since it was posted on May 19.

"How the hell does anybody at 17 years old know what they wanna do for the rest of their life?" he says in the video, recalling being questioned by a school counselor. "Nobody does...so really, the system is a failed system."



Close-up image (pictured left) of Marty Friedman, a 96-year-old who left his career as an optometrist to work in sales, as well as him standing at a gym (right). **Marty Friedman**

Friedman's story resonates particularly in light of a national student survey released in November 2022 by YouScience, which found that 75 percent of high school graduates do not feel prepared to make college or career decisions. Friedman's own high school guidance counselor had asked him what he wanted to do with his life, a question he now calls absurd. "It's really not fair to put young people in a box and say 'what are you gonna do?' You wanna get the best education you can and learn how to get along with people," he said.

Born in 1929 in Newark, New Jersey, Friedman graduated from high school in 1947. He initially pursued optometry, obtaining his O.D. from the New England College of Optometry after being rejected by Drew University due to poor reading skills. He overcame this setback by taking an eight-week reading course at Rutgers University and later studying at Fairleigh Dickinson University.

Optometry, however, proved unsatisfying. Though he passed the New Jersey state board easily and opened his own private practice after a year working under another person, he told *Newsweek*: "Everybody said I was terrific, but I didn't like it."

Two incidents defined his disenchantment and [decision to change careers](#). After diagnosing a patient with glaucoma, the patient never returned, opting instead for follow-ups with an ophthalmologist. Another patient chose to go with an ophthalmologist's prescription over Friedman's more thorough eye exam. The low patient volume—just six to eight a day—also left him feeling unfulfilled.

"You shouldn't do what you don't like," he said. When he told his father that he disliked optometry, the response was curt. His dad said: "Nobody, nobody likes what they do. That's why they call it work."

But his mother [encouraged a different path](#), saying "when you find something you like, you'll never have to work a day in your life." Friedman took that to heart. After being rejected from pharmaceutical sales for being a doctor, he found an opening in the only industry that would have him—wholesale TVs and appliances.

"In 1956, I found a job in the only business that would take me," he told *Newsweek*, describing how the industry was seen as a landing spot for people "with no qualifications." He began a 60-day unpaid trial as a salesman, given gas money for just one of the two months of the trial period.

"I have no regrets," Friedman said. "I was very fortunate to have the strength to give up optometry because people don't give up a sure thing."



Marty Friedman with his granddaughter Izzi (pictured left) and him pictured outdoors next to a Citation Jet plane. **Marty Friedman**

That gamble paid off and Friedman has never retired. He still runs Eastern Marketing Corp, his TV and appliance company in Roseland, New Jersey, operating several brands across Italy, Turkey, China and South Korea. "I still love the business. I love helping retailers grow their businesses," he said.

His granddaughter Izzi, who is a New York-based content creator and the founder of Socialize by Izzi and the CEO of the Girls Girls Club, credits her entrepreneurial drive to his example.

"Despite our age gap, generational differences, and experiences, my grandpa has been one of my greatest mentors," she told *Newsweek*. "He's taught me how to protect what I build, lead with love, and never stop learning."

Friedman splits his time between homes in New Jersey and Delray Beach, Florida, where his peers often ask how he spends his time. His reply is as direct as ever. He says: "Well, I'm here to live. You may have come here to die—that's what old people do, they go to resort areas to die."

He notes: "I don't want to die. I am going to live, and therefore I want to accomplish a lot of things...I want to keep learning and I want to take care of myself and enjoy myself."