



The Wright Stuff: From NBC to Autism Speaks

Bob Wright, Diane Mermigas

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Named president and CEO of NBC at the age of 43, he faced a two-headed dragon: on one hand, distrust from the network people deeply skeptical of the "suit" from GE, their new corporate parent; and on the other, fiscal oversight demands from a cautious, conservative institution reluctant to invest heavily in a media business they didn't understand. For the next 20 years, he managed to navigate the fine line between the two and in the process completely reinvent - and save - the network.

His name is Bob Wright. Under his leadership a traditional network, struggling to survive a changing landscape, was transformed into a \$45 billion cable and Internet giant. Frequently flying under the GE corporate radar, Wright and his handpicked team spearheaded what amounts to a revolution in broadcast television:

- Embracing rather than resisting cable
- Launching alternative news channels CNBC and MSNBC along with MSNBC.com, NBC's powerful springboard to the Internet
- Creating strategic partnerships with other media companies formerly considered competitors
- A string of acquisitions that solidified NBC's leadership in multiple US and international markets, culminating in the lucrative merger into NBC Universal

What does someone like that do when he retires? If he's Bob Wright, he starts all over again. At almost the exact same time as Bob's NBC reign was winding down, his grandson, Christian, was diagnosed with autism, a condition then poorly understood. Baffled by a lack of medical knowledge and community support, Bob and his wife, Suzanne, founded Autism Speaks, which in short order became the leading advocacy and research funding organization for this mysterious condition that so devastates families. They make a powerful team - the compassionate, charismatic, indefatigable Suzanne who won't take no for an answer and the analytic, efficient executive who poured all his business acumen into building an organization...

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Michelle Oquinn:

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