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# Donny Deutsch on winning

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Everyone has an opinion about Donny Deutsch, the brash New York advertising executive and host of CNBC's *The Big Idea With Donny Deutsch*, but it's hard to deny his success. Now, Deutsch, 47, has written a book, *Often Wrong, Never in Doubt: Unleash the Business Rebel Within*, with Peter Knobler. He recently spoke with *U.S. News* about advertising, TV, and how to succeed.

## **Where did you learn most about business?**

You learn by getting thrown into the deep end of the pool. By going into a small family business [his father's advertising agency], I got a broad perspective early on. You learn lessons along the way—each year you realize how stupid you were the year before. What I try to get across in the book is how important entitlement is in business. People should not be afraid to embrace failure.

## **Would you have pursued the field if you hadn't seen your father's career path?**

Probably not. I certainly would have always been drawn to something that had both creativity and business. To me, Wall Street wouldn't have been enough. Building creative content and selling it was what I was always drawn to.

## **What's the most important lesson you learned at your first job?**

The importance of staying true to yourself but still assimilating in a corporate culture. Understand the environment you're working in, but still bring something fresh at the same time.

## **Can you succeed in business without being creative?**

No. Creativity is a broad word. Even if you're a trader on Wall Street or running a hedge fund, you need to be creative in the way you think and approach things. That's like saying, "Do you need to be smart?" as far as I'm concerned. I think creativity is just more than ever a necessity.

## **How would you describe the Deutsch Inc. brand?**

The Deutsch persona: The people who work at Deutsch have big brains, big hearts, thick skin, and are 2 percent off center. More than anything, our culture has been about

winning. It's been about cutting-edge creativity with big smarts attached. Going for the gold. If this is the account you've been waiting 10 years to pitch—you just have to close it. Failure is an option. You sometimes don't get second chances. You can fail; we all do. If you're great at what you do, you'll rise to the top.

### **How did you develop your management style?**

You do it on the streets. Understanding people's strengths and weaknesses that you're motivating or you're managing. Also, understanding the strengths and weaknesses of the competition and exploiting them. Management all comes down to understanding people. There's nothing more complex about management. The Ronald Reagan school of management: Hire and surround yourself with people smarter than you, and everything falls into place.

### **Why are advertising executives held in such low regard?**

A small part is the media over the years, which has made the ad exec the bumbling Darren Stevens [of *Bewitched*]. Somehow, over the years, a lot of agencies maybe didn't have the best creative product. They said the only way to hold on to clients is to do whatever they say. Because of that, they've been marginalized. A lot of agencies now are looked at as vendors, and that's got to change.

### **In advertising, where's the line between lying and beautifying a product?**

Lying is never good advertising. The best advertising starts with the truth. You'll never win by losing a consumer's trust. The best advertising shows the true essence of a brand in a way that is most appealing.

### **How did advertising transition into a television show?**

For the last 20 years, I've been trying to understand what motivates people in this country. To me, what better skill set to be a TV host and interview people to understand what's going on in their minds? My business background of being a no-nonsense, no-bull CEO has made me a good interviewer. Certainly, my TV career started with the call when someone wanted a quote about advertising or marketing. I was always on the other side of the cameras, so I had some experience that way, and it was a natural feeding ground. I'm at the point in my career where I want to take my skill set, which is building creative content and connecting with people, and broaden it. I think the two actually go hand in hand, and it's great exposure for the agency, so it's a win-win.

### **Why write a book?**

I realized over the years that I have a philosophy about managing people, creativity, building a business, drive, and motivation. Maybe there is something to share. I didn't want to do a book about advertising, but do a more reflective book. Hopefully, it's for

somebody who's either starting a business or a salesman—a bit of a motivational, get-up-and-go book.

**What have been your career highlights and lowlights?**

A highlight for me was being part of the Clinton-Gore creative team in '92. Riding around on the bus, shooting the footage of the bus tour—just to be a small part of that was so exciting. A low point was a bad partnership in the early '90s that split up and made the agency very vulnerable.

**Any interest in pursuing politics?**

I just might. I've talked a bit about running for mayor of New York someday. Mike Bloomberg has been a great example of what a businessman can do for New York.

**Do you worry about burning bridges?**

You can't be all things to all people. If you can get a core constituency passionate about you, then you have to be true to yourself. This agency hasn't always been for everyone, but we've been wildly successful. If you're going to try to be all things to everybody, you'll stand for nothing.