

The Power of Resilience

An Interview with Adrienne Arsht

EDITORS' NOTE *Adrienne Arsht is a business leader and impact philanthropist. She has taken a leading role promoting artistic, business and civic growth in the three cities she calls home: Washington, D.C., Miami and New York. Her \$30 million contribution to Miami's Performing Arts Center in 2008 secured its financial footing. In her honor, the Center was renamed the Adrienne Arsht Center for the Performing Arts of Miami-Dade County. In 2012, her contribution of \$10 million to Lincoln Center was recognized with the dedication of the Adrienne Arsht Stage in Alice Tully Hall.*



Adrienne Arsht

Recently, Arsht donated \$5 million to the Metropolitan Museum in New York City to fund the Museum's first ever paid internship program, which now will be named the Adrienne Arsht Interns. With Arsht's gift, The Met is now the single largest art museum in the country to offer 100 percent paid internships to nearly 120 undergraduate and graduate interns each year. The transformative donation will also support MetLiveArts providing programming focused on themes of resilience.

In Washington, D.C. in 2016, Arsht spearheaded the creation of the Adrienne Arsht Center for Resilience at The Atlantic Council which was renamed in 2019, the Adrienne Arsht-Rockefeller Foundation Resilience Center with the \$30

million Rockefeller Foundation gift that she matched. She also founded the Adrienne Arsht Latin America Center at the Atlantic Council in 2013 to focus on the role of South America in the trans-Atlantic community. Arsht is a Trustee of the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts where she established the Adrienne Arsht Theater Fund. She is a Vice Chairman of Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, and Executive Vice Chairman of the Atlantic Council. She is on the Trustees Council of The National Gallery of Art and a Board Member of the Blair House

Restoration Fund. She is a member of the Council on Foreign Relations and is former President of the Vice President's Residence Foundation. At the request of the then Secretary of State, Hilary Clinton, Arsht created the campaign Patrons of Diplomacy to establish an endowment for the preservation of furniture and works of art for the State Department.

She is Trustee Emerita of the University of Miami and an honorary board member of Amigos for Kids.

In 2019, Arsht was awarded The Order of Rio Branco from the Brazilian government for her outstanding dedication to U.S.-Brazil relations and her vision toward Latin America. In 2017, she was bestowed the Carnegie Hall Medal of Excellence recognizing her visionary and exceptional contributions to cultural and nonprofit institutions nationally. She is the only woman to have ever received

this distinction. Additionally, Arsht was awarded the distinguished Order of San Carlos of Colombia, which was given to her by the direction of Colombia's President Juan Manuel Santos. In 2013, she was presented with the prestigious diplomatic honor, Orden de Isabel la Católica (Order of the Cross of Isabella the Catholic), from The King of Spain.

A 1966 graduate of Villanova Law School, Arsht began her Delaware law career with Morris, Nichols, Arsht & Tunnel. In 1969, she moved to New York City and joined the legal department of Trans World Airlines (TWA). She then became the first woman in the company's property, cargo and government relations departments. Arsht moved to Washington, D.C. in 1979 where she initially worked with a law firm, then started her own title company. In 1996, she moved to Miami to run her family-owned bank, TotalBank, where she served as Chairman of the Board from 1996 to 2007. Under her leadership, TotalBank grew from four locations to 14 with over \$1.4 billion in assets. In 2007, she sold the bank to Banco Popular Español. Arsht was named Chairman Emerita of TotalBank.

In 2008, she became the first, and still the only, woman to join the Five Million Dollar Roundtable of United Way of Miami-Dade. Arsht's other notable gifts include to Goucher College, creating the Roxana Cannon Arsht Center for Ethics and Leadership, in honor of her late mother, a Goucher graduate, The University of Miami Arsht Ethics Programs, and a lab at Bascom Palmer Eye Institute of the University of



The iconic children's book, *The Little Engine That Could*

Miami. In Delaware, Arsht funded the creation of a Best Buddies chapter to specifically serve Hispanics and African Americans with mental disabilities. The Chronicle of Philanthropy ranked Arsht number 39 on its 2008 America's biggest donors list.

She is the daughter of the Honorable Roxana Cannon Arsht, the first female judge in the State of Delaware, and Samuel Arsht, a prominent Wilmington attorney. Upon graduation from Villanova Law School, Arsht was the 11th woman admitted to the Delaware bar – her mother having been the fifth. A graduate of Mount Holyoke College, she was married to the late Myer Feldman (d.2007), former counsel to Presidents John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson.

Where did your interest and passion for the study of resilience develop?

Until June 30, 1973, I took resilience for granted. That was the day my younger sister, Alison, committed suicide. What made living unbearable for her? What is Resilience? Resilience is getting up when you are knocked down and then moving forward. It is choosing life. It is a primal instinct, but it is not always enough. We both started life with "Itsy Bitsy Spider" and "The Little Engine that Could." How could Alison not be resilient when we had virtually the same upbringing? A large part of my interest in resilience was inspired by the desire to understand Alison.

What was your vision in creating the Adrienne Arsht-Rockefeller Foundation Resilience Center and how do you define its mission?

Initially, in 2016, I created the Adrienne Arsht Center for Resilience focusing on promoting the abilities of communities and individuals to thrive in today's unpredictable world. Using creative and artistic methods to showcase lessons learned from past crises, the Center's focus would help societies and individuals bounce back better, faster, and stronger.

Then, in 2019, the Rockefeller Foundation made a \$30 million grant which I matched to create the Adrienne Arsht-Rockefeller Foundation Resilience Center (AARFRC). The AARFRC is focused on identifying, implementing, and scaling solutions to the urgent crises of climate change, migration, and security, with the goal of reaching one billion people with resilience solutions by 2030.

This is more critical now than ever. As a society we are at a time when volatility and change are the only certainties. The AARFRC is committed to finding ways to enable resilience among individuals, systems, and communities.

How critical is resilience as the world faces multiple crises, from the pandemic to social injustice, systemic racism, migration and climate?

It is vital and without resilience the world would have imploded long ago. Resilience is another word for surviving, adapting and moving on.

Do you feel that resilience can be taught or is it something a person is born with?

I have always thought that individual resilience is predominately genetic, but resilience can also be encouraged. The brain, the immune system and the physical changes that occur during stress and trauma are different in resilient people. You can learn from watching others and decide, "I'm not going to give up either."



Who are some of the resilient leaders you see today?

There are so many people who are considered resilient leaders. Jackie Robinson, who was an exceptional human being, not only did he break racial barriers in baseball but in everyday life. He said it best, "A life is not important except in the impact it has on other lives." He, along with his wife, Rachel, faced daily obstacles and surmounted them with courage and fortitude. Diana Nyad exemplifies the synergy of a resilient mind and body as she swam amongst sharks and jellyfish during her famous swim from Cuba to Florida. Artists are almost by definition resilient. They

have a saying, "The show must go on." There was Baryshnikov, who smashed his foot during a performance, and yet continued partnering the ballerina until the curtain came down. Jean-Yves Thibaudet, the great French pianist, was performing when the piano started to move across the stage. The stagehands had forgotten to lock the wheels. I've found that all great artists have a story, whether it was a prop that wasn't there for them, somebody forgetting their lines or scenery falling. Resilience comes in all forms and we have seen this personified during the past months.

My advice for moving forward: If you don't like Change – wait until you see Irrelevance. ●