

## A Conversation With Bob Wright



**EDITORS' NOTE** Bob Wright has had a diversified career in general management, marketing, and broadcasting. He served as vice chairman of General Electric and president, CEO, and chairman of NBC and NBC Universal from 1986 to 2007. Prior to that, he served as president of General Electric Financial Services and before that as president of Cox Cable Communications. He is a senior advisor of THL Capital, CEO and Chairman of the Palm Beach Civic Association, and a trustee of New York Presbyterian Hospital. He is a former member of the executive committee of Rand Corporation, Ralph Lauren Corporation, AMC Networks Inc. and a former director of Autism Speaks and EMI Group Global Ltd. Wright is an advisor to Ralph Lauren at Ralph Lauren Corporation and to Josh Sapan at AMC Networks Inc. In 2005, Wright and his late wife, Suzanne, co-founded Autism Speaks, a national foundation dedicated to raising public awareness and research funds for autism. Since its inception, Autism Speaks has committed more than \$600 million to its mission, the majority in science and medical research, and has grown into the world's leading autism advocacy organization. In 2008, Wright was named in the Heroes and Pioneers category of the TIME 100, the magazine's annual list of the most influential people. He also received the first Double Helix Award for Corporate Leadership from Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory; the NYU Child Advocacy Award; the Castle Connolly National Health Leadership Award; the American Ireland Fund Humanitarian Award; the Citizens United for Research in Epilepsy 2011 Leadership Award; the Moffly Media's Light a Fire Lifetime Achievement Award; and the Eugene M. Lang Lifetime Achievement Award from the I Have A Dream Foundation. In 2013, he received the Dean's Medal from the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health for Global Leadership in Autism Research and Advocacy. In addition Wright received honorary degrees from St. John's University, St. Joseph's University, Fairfield University and UMass Medical School. He graduated from the College of the Holy Cross in Worcester, Massachusetts, and the Law School of the University of Virginia. Wright and his wife, Susan Keenan Wright, live in Palm Beach and actively work together advocating for individuals with autism and supporting charitable organizations nationally and in their community. Between them, the Wrights have 5 children and 6 grandchildren.

**What do you feel were the keys to your impact and success in your business career?**

Patience with hard work and hiring the best people I could find.

**Where did your interest and passion for philanthropy develop?**

Even before I was successful, I tried hard to put time into not-for-profit organizations. My mother was a lifelong schoolteacher, and she taught first and second grade to underserved children. I spent many hours watching my mother in her classroom give above and beyond to her students.

**What do you feel are the keys to being effective and making an impact in philanthropic work?**

Dedication and understanding the needs of the people you are trying to help.



**Do you approach your philanthropic work the same way you approach your business efforts?**

Yes – look for the best, hire the best.

**How do you decide where to focus your philanthropic support?**

Naturally, my first focus is on children with Autism. I also select charities in my own community where I feel I can make a difference.

**What does success mean to you?**

I have achieved my goals that I set for myself in my life.

**When you think of legacy, is the impact that you have made on countless lives through your philanthropic work what means the most to you?**

Yes, making a difference in the lives of others is what is most important to me.

**What advice do you offer to young people beginning their careers?**

Never give up, believe in yourself, and the strength of others. ●



Bob Wright speaking at an Autism Speaks event (top);

"A Lifetime of Commitment – Celebrating Bob Wright" event where The Center for Discovery presented Bob Wright with the Lifetime Achievement Award, recognizing his legacy of doing for others (above); Susan and Bob Wright being honored at an Ann Norton Sculpture event (left)