



LEARN FROM THE APPRENTICE

SEASON ONE
WINNER OF
"THE APPRENTICE,"
BILL RANCIC,
SHARES DONALD
TRUMP'S KEYS
TO BUSINESS
SUCCESS AT THE
2010 COSE
SMALL BUSINESS
CONFERENCE.

by Kristen Hampshire

"YOU'RE FIRED!"

Long before winning season one of "The Apprentice," Bill Rancic decided those were two words he never wanted to hear. He was driven to avoid that token "goodbye" Donald Trump offers to unsuccessful candidates on the NBC reality show, where hungry executives-in-the-making vie for a six-figure salaried position at The Trump Organization.

"Nine months out of college, I took a job in the corporate market and I saw a guy who had been at the company for 30 years get fired," says Rancic, 39.

Since then, Rancic has emerged from the first season of "The Apprentice" as winner and returned to the show as a guest judge. "I got lucky—[Trump] and I hit it off pretty well," Rancic says of his mentor, whose astute business sense and deep experience inspires Rancic.

Meanwhile, Rancic has also learned a lot of "don'ts" in his journey as the host of A&E's *We Mean Business*, where he helps struggling entrepreneurs identify fresh solutions to revamp their businesses.

At the COSE Small Business Conference, October 20 and 21 at the I-X Center, Rancic will share lessons learned from Donald Trump and other great businesspeople he has had the fortune of spending time with. "Change and agility is the major theme," he hints.

Open for Business

Rancic has always, naturally, been in business. He was the kid trolling up the street with a lawn mower and a sales pitch for anyone with long grass. He was the young guy willing to program your VCR or do an odd job around the house. Rancic, a son of educators, jokes that he learned negotiation at a young age because he had to compete for bathroom time with three older sisters.

"Whatever it was, I was very entrepreneurial and I was figuring out what I liked and didn't like by trying it, not necessarily reading a book," he says of his hands-on style.

He was always into something. "Always," he says emphatically. "Some ideas were good, others were bad, but I figured it out—and my parents let me make mistakes," he says, relaying the most important lesson his parents taught him: "It's OK to make mistakes. It's OK to not always hit a home run. But it is never OK to not try."

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Rancic took this advice and ran with it. His first formal business startup was during his college years when he launched a boat detailing business outside of his hometown Chicago. Profits defrayed the cost of his tuition at Loyola University.

“That really opened my eyes to entrepreneurship because I got to spend a lot of time with these people who owned boats, and I realized they weren’t that different from me,” Rancic says. “It gave me a lot of confidence as a young person. I knew I was going to do my own thing because those were the people living the lifestyle I wanted to live one day.”

His next significant venture, 12 years ago, was in the cigar business. Soon after graduating from college, he founded cigararoundtheworld.com in a 400-square-foot studio apartment with virtually no startup capital. “I started to see the [cigar] trend taking off—a magazine came out, and it hit me one day that this could be the winner,” Rancic says of the niche market that

has, indeed, exploded in the last decade.

Today, Rancic’s thriving, multi-million-dollar national operation is publicly traded (Synergy Brands) and he still is involved in day-to-day operations. Rancic also is building a name in Chicago’s real estate market, and he’s pushing business boundaries in reality TV as he and his wife, former *E!* anchorwoman Guilana DePandi, air their relationship on the Style Network show *Guilana & Bill*. (The two also started a reality production company called You and I productions.)

All the while, Rancic has authored two books to motivate others to leverage their skills and abilities and take the plunge into entrepreneurship: *You’re Hired: How to Succeed in Business and Life from the Winner of “The Apprentice”* (2003), and *Beyond the Lemonade Stand*, which is targeted to young people ages 8 to 13 “to fuel that entrepreneurial spirit.”

As for “The Apprentice,” Rancic learned about the opportunity from a friend’s mother, and the show has been a “game-changing event” in his life. “It gave me the opportunity to look at myself from the outside,” Rancic says, joking that it was a great sociological experiment. “I compare it to when you are a kid and the first time you recorded your voice and played it back. You say, ‘That’s not me. I don’t sound like that.’ But it really is you.”

During the time Rancic was on “The Apprentice,” and after as he has continued working with Donald Trump, he has learned some critical lessons from the business magnate and socialite.

Lessons From Trump

Don’t quit. Donald Trump wasn’t always living the high life. “A lot of people forget where he was in the early 1990s—and that seems like a lifetime ago—but the real estate market in New York City was not doing well,” Rancic relates. “In fact, it was quite horrible.”

Trump was millions in debt, and no one would return his calls. “He didn’t give up—he didn’t make excuses,” Rancic says. “He fought like hell and he came back. Most people would have thrown in the towel, but he didn’t do that.”

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Today, business owners can blame the economy for poor performance, or they can adapt and tap different market opportunities. "The businesses that do really well are the ones who change the game plan and adjust," Rancic says.

Change or die. "If you are doing the same thing you were two years ago, you are probably doing something wrong," Rancic says simply. Sure, leaving your comfort zone is not easy. "So many of us have become creatures of habit, but that doesn't work during turbulent times."

Take off your blinders and you'll find opportunity. "We need to change; otherwise we won't be around," Rancic says.

Win fairly. The old adage to treat others as you would like to be treated is still true in today's business environment. Rancic says being true to himself helped him win "The Apprentice" fair and square.

"I've always tried to take the high road every opportunity I've had—I didn't back stab, I didn't cheat anyone," he says. "That was the only way I would have wanted to win the competition. It wasn't worth it for me to go in and throw people under the bus."

Think creatively. "The Apprentice" is a PR home-run for Donald Trump and a way to boost his brand in a way that no other business owner had attempted: by using reality TV as a tool. "You have to find creative ways to solve problems, and Trump finds creative ways to make things happen," Rancic says simply.

Stay agile. Rancic is always asking, "What's next?" And he has taken on new challenges since his "Apprentice" win, from overseeing the construction of Chicago's Trump Tower to writing a *New York Times* bestselling book and traveling the world to motivate other entrepreneurs. Agility helped Rancic win "The Apprentice." "I was able to adapt differently to each task," he says. "I did not use the same strategies every week, which aided in my success." ●