

Media Guru

An Interview with Roger Ailes,
Chairman and Chief Executive Officer, Fox News Channel, and Chairman, Fox Television Stations

EDITORS' NOTE Roger Ailes began his television career as Property Assistant, Producer, and Executive Producer for KYW-TV on The Mike Douglas Show. In 1969, he founded Ailes Communications, Inc., in New York and consulted for various businesses and politicians. He also tried his hand in theater, producing and directing television specials on Robert Kennedy and a host of other luminaries. Ailes served as a political consultant for



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many candidates during the 1960s, '70s, and '80s with his first job as Media Advisor for the Nixon campaign in 1968. He was a consultant to Ronald Reagan in the latter stages of the 1984 campaign and later aided with behind-the-scenes speechwriting and coaching for both President and Mrs. Bush at the GOP Convention in Houston. In 1984, Ailes helped produce a television special, Television and the Presidency. In 1988, he wrote a book with long-time aide Jon Kraushar called You Are the Message: Secrets of the Master Communicators. In 1991, Ailes convinced a syndicator to bring Rush Limbaugh from radio to television and he became executive producer of that late-night show. In 1993, he became President of the cable channel CNBC and began planning another NBC cable channel, America's Talking. Ailes also hosted his own nightly show, Straight Forward, an hour-long talk show. He left the network in February 1996 and was hired by Rupert Murdoch to create Fox News Channel for News Corporation. Ailes was named Chairman of the Fox Television Stations Group in 2005 and he signed a new deal in 2012 that keeps him at the network for another four years through 2016, at which time he will have served as head of Fox News Channel for 20 years. In addition to heading Fox News and chairing Fox Television Stations, Ailes also chairs Twentieth Television, MyNetworkTV, and Fox Business Network. In 2008, Ailes bought a local newspaper in Cold Spring, New York – Putnam County News and Recorder – which is published by his wife, Beth. He also purchased The Putnam County Courier in 2009. In 1962, Ailes received a bachelor's degree from Ohio University, where he majored in radio and television. Since 1994 he has funded scholarships for Ohio University students via the school's telecommunications programs.

COMPANY BRIEF FOX News Channel (www.foxnews.com; FNC) is a 24-hour all-encompassing news service dedicated to delivering breaking news as well as political and business news. FNC is a top five cable network and has been the most watched news channel in the country for 10 years. According to Public Policy Polling, it is the most trusted and objective television news source in the country. Owned by News Corp., FNC is available in more than 90 million homes and dominates the cable news landscape, routinely notching the top 10 programs in the genre.

What was your vision for Fox News Channel and has it evolved as you expected?

There were surprises along the road, but in the beginning, I believed there was a huge news audience in America that was being underserved. National surveys showed the same thing: there was only a single point of view being presented.

We feel that alternative points of view are extremely important and we needed to continue to offer just that – all sides of the political spectrum. We looked to be fair and balanced but to open it up to other points of view.

We have never turned down a point of view at Fox News – I have 23 left-wing contributors and just as many right-wing contributors. We are open to as many views as are out there. This is important, especially with young people, because this group is disillusioned and is looking for a new direction for the country.

The audience has responded – we tied CNN in five years and we moved ahead in the sixth year. We have been number one for close to 12 years in cable news. We're always the number three, four, or five cable network out of all of the cable networks.

Our competitors, MSNBC and CNN, are not in the top 30.

So we have found an audience and that is what I envisioned when it started. Our goal was to have no story that we would not cover.

Does the television audience recognize that you are providing a broad range of opinions?

No. The people who criticize us are largely the people we're beating. They say that having Sean Hannity and Bill O'Reilly is what makes us

populist, but those hosts don't do news shows – they do talk/opinion shows.

So we have Hannity and O'Reilly, but our news coverage – which is all day long and in prime time and on weekends – is essentially nobody's point of view and there is no story we won't cover.

Will the networks be able to compete and what must they do to remain relevant?

Today, a lot of younger people are getting news from the Internet – the digital side and even social media; some young people think they get real news from Jon Stewart.

In the cable media world, prime time has shifted: it's no longer 7 to 10 in the evening. We put up a show at 5 PM, which is essentially the worst time period because people aren't typically in front of the TV, and our ratings for that show almost rival Bill O'Reilly's show, which has been number one for 12 years.

So if you put something up, and it is interesting and objective, people will find it and watch it.

Most of the sitcoms the networks do aren't relevant to most people.

How does one remain optimistic when you consider the challenges in Washington?

If the standards of business were applied to politics, probably 80 percent of the politicians would be fired or would quit because they don't have staying power.

There is a tremendous lack of guts and a lot of manipulation going on in Washington.

I'm optimistic because George Washington created this country from nothing. But he had leadership – he made decisions, he lost battles, he regrouped. He did things that people would not think of doing. This attitude gets things done. All progress is made by unreasonable people.

How critical is it going forward that New York's new mayor engages the business community?

Without respect for business and knowledge of business, the city will fail. Business has to be the underpinning of a great city.

The top 10 cities in terms of poverty in this country are all one-party cities and they all lack an understanding of business.

So if you want poverty, then ignore business.

Will you ever slow down?

Yes. But I think America is in the fight of its life, and Fox News is making a contribution to the media and forcing people to look at all stories. Because we are in that fight, and because I can stay in it, I will continue to do it. ●