



George H. Ross

EDITORS' NOTE In addition to his current post, George Ross is one of Donald Trump's two advisors on the NBC reality television program *The Apprentice*. Ross attended Clemson University and Brooklyn College, and earned his law degree from Brooklyn Law School. He was admitted to practice in New York State in 1953. He teaches courses in negotiation and real estate transactions at New York University and is the author of two books, *Trump Strategies For Real Estate* and *Trump Style Negotiation*.

COMPANY BRIEF *The Trump Organization* (trump.com) is a premier international real estate company with holdings that include the Trump International Hotel & Tower, the Trump World Tower at the United Nations Plaza, and Trump Park Avenue. Headquartered in Trump Tower in New York, *The Trump Organization* also owns *The Mar-a-Lago Club* in Palm Beach, Florida, and 15 nationally and internationally acclaimed golf courses. *The Trump Organization* was chosen as the developer for the Old Post Office Building in Washington, D.C. in early 2012.

Did you think early on that you would spend so much of your career here and what has made it a special place for you?

The evolution more than anything. I was head of a major law firm where we had 120 lawyers at one point doing nothing but real estate. I handled Donald's father as a client and I also handled Donald's first deal with the Commodore Hotel, which he turned into the Grand Hyatt.

When I met Donald, I was still practicing law. Later on, he became a client of my law firm. I left the law firm and went into different areas but still kept in touch with Donald tangentially.

When I got bored with what I was doing and decided to retire, Donald asked me to come work with him. This was 16 years ago.

How do you define your role?

Early on in my career, I represented two multimillionaires for 10 years.

The Art of Negotiation

An Interview with George H. Ross,
Executive Vice President and Senior Counsel, The Trump Organization

They handled real estate in New York at that time – they bought many properties and I was directly involved. When I started with them in 1956, they had 18 pieces of property; when I left them 10 years later, they had 720.

During that time, I learned the business of real estate – how a real estate operator looks at deals, and how he makes and negotiates deals, which was an entirely different world from law. As a result, when I went back to practicing law, I had a unique skill set – I was a lawyer who knew the real estate business.

When I became more involved with Donald, this became relevant. I could now advise him about a business decision or make business decisions that he would make.

I became an advisor to him because I would tell him the reality but not necessarily as a lawyer.

I have had a major career focus on negotiation and have taught classes on it at NYU for 20 years. I've made an extensive study of it.

I was a lawyer who understood business who could negotiate – that's a rare combination.

Many think of Donald as a great negotiator, but aren't you as well?

It's a different level of negotiation. Donald paints in broad strokes – he has a brilliant mind. He will speak to a CEO of a major corporation and discuss making a deal and that CEO will agree on the basics. Then they refer the implementation to me – my negotiation is with the people in the trenches. The CEO of the other organization turns it over to the troops in his organization and finalization begins.

It's at a different level but I know what is acceptable to Donald and I can negotiate for him.

Knowing Donald, doesn't he always say, "Couldn't we have done better?"

Yes, but everybody says that. My answer is, no. You have to know when to stop. A good negotiator says, "I am satisfied," and closes the deal.

It requires looking at the deal from all sides, both the positives and potential negatives.

At day's end, is Donald about more than real estate?

Yes, he's a brand. If you put the Trump name on anything, it's immediately recognized as something that relates to luxury. You're going to get one-step above.

Donald's ideas are unlimited.

With so many opportunities, is it hard to pick which to pursue?

Yes, but that's his job. You look into it and see if it pans out. Sometimes deals have prestige but they are losers, so we have to assess if it's worth the time and effort. If we want deals to make money, we have to look at them very intensely. Every transaction has pluses and minuses.

Are the deals still as exciting even after you've done so many?

They're still exciting, though probably to a lesser extent. As you age, you get to the point where you have done all of it. But I still look at buildings and get a thrill out of saying I was involved in this or that. I can go down any main street in Manhattan and there is an imprint of mine somewhere. Because of my involvement, this building exists.

You've seen all three of Donald's children come into the company. How special has that been and how does that make you feel about the longevity of this company?

His three children are wonderful. They have a fantastic working relationship with their father; they're extremely bright; and they work hard and have learned the business well. I don't see a longevity problem at all.

You can look at 40 Wall Street, which is the best real estate deal I've seen – you buy a million-square-foot building for \$1 per square foot in downtown New York that is now worth more than \$500 million. Today, Donald doesn't have to get involved with that; the children handle it.

They're smart and they do many of the things that Donald did previously.

Have you enjoyed being on TV?

I didn't realize it would only leave three hours a week for my other work. The rest of the time I would be involved with the show. By the time I understood the level of commitment required, I could not get out of it. I realized something that I never knew, which is the power of television. Now when I go back and lecture at colleges and point out that I have practiced law for more than 50 years, and have done more major real estate deals in New York than any other lawyer – Who cares? Nobody except those that know me. You do the show and fire some nice young kids, and suddenly that's what everyone knows you for and your reputation is made. ●