

## The Ability To Inspire And Motivate

### An Interview with Adrienne Arsht

**EDITORS' NOTE** Adrienne Arsht is a business leader, philanthropist, and global resilience advocate. Born in Wilmington, Delaware, Arsht is a graduate of Mount Holyoke College, where she earned her bachelor's degree. She later received her Juris Doctor from Villanova University School of Law. In 1966, she became the 11th woman admitted to the Delaware Bar. Arsht began her legal career at Morris, Nichols, Arsht & Tunnell, and later joined Trans World Airlines in New York,



Adrienne Arsht

becoming the first woman in its legal department to work in property, cargo, and government relations. She moved to Washington, DC, in 1979, where she founded a title company, and eventually relocated to Miami in 1996 to lead her family's bank, TotalBank, as Chair of the Board. Under her leadership, the bank grew significantly and was sold in 2007 for a premium. Upon the sale of the bank, she made a commitment to give away all her wealth. Her strategic investments in the arts, resilience, and diplomacy have made her a transformative force in both national and international spheres. She made a landmark \$30 million gift to Miami's Performing Arts Center in 2008 and was honored that it became the Adrienne Arsht Center for the Performing Arts. She later endowed the Center with \$11 million to establish a fully paid internship program, expanding access to careers in arts administration. In New York, she has made historic contributions to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, including a \$10 million gift in 2022 to support the MetLiveArts series and a \$5 million donation to establish the Adrienne Arsht Interns, making The Met the largest U.S. art museum to offer fully paid internships. In 2012, her contribution of \$10 million to Lincoln Center was recognized with the dedication of the Adrienne Arsht Stage in Alice Tully Hall. In Washington, DC, Arsht founded the Adrienne Arsht Latin America Center at the Atlantic Council to focus on the role of Latin America and the Caribbean in the trans-Atlantic community. She also created and funded a Center for Resilience at the Atlantic Council, which evolved into the National Security Resilience Initiative, and launched the Community-Based Resilience Solutions Initiative at the Smithsonian Institution. She has held numerous leadership and advisory roles,

including Executive Vice Chairman, Atlantic Council; Trustee Emerita, Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts and University of Miami; Honorary Trustee, Metropolitan Museum of Art; Former Trustee, John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts; Chair, Arsht-Cannon Foundation Advisory Committee; Member, Council on Foreign Relations; Member of the National Advisory Board of the Sandra Day O'Connor Institute for American Democracy; Former President of the Vice President's Residence

Foundation; and Former Board Member of the Blair House Restoration Fund. She has also led initiatives at the U.S. State Department, including the Patrons of Diplomacy campaign, and established the Roxana Cannon Arsht Law Fellowship at Volunteer Legal Advocates (formerly DC Volunteer Lawyers Project) to support legal aid in domestic violence and family law. Arsht's significant global initiatives have been recognized with numerous

honors, including 2025 Order of the First State, Delaware's highest honor; 2025 Horatio Alger Award; Friend of Spain by the Spain-U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the Leading Brands of Spain Forum; Order of Princess Olga, III Degree (Ukraine); Ecuador National Order Honorato Vasquez, Grade: Commander; Obtli Award (Mexico); Order of Rio Branco (Brazil); Order of San Carlos (Colombia); Orden de Isabel la Católica/Order of the Cross of Isabella the Catholic (Spain); Carnegie Hall Medal of Excellence – first woman recipient; and Ernst & Young Entrepreneur of the Year in Finance (Florida). She holds honorary degrees from Mount Holyoke College, Goucher College, Barry University, and is an honorary member of Beta Gamma Sigma at Georgetown University. She is the daughter of the Honorable Roxana Cannon Arsht, the first female judge in the State of Delaware, and S. Samuel Arsht, a prominent Wilmington attorney. She was married to the late Myer Feldman (d.2007), former counsel to Presidents John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson.



Adrienne Arsht – 2025 Horatio Alger Award recipient



Adrienne Arsht with Tanya Tucker, Grammy Award-Winning Country Music Singer-Songwriter, who received an award at the 2026 Atlantic Council Distinguished Leadership Awards Gala

**What do you feel are the keys to effective leadership?**

Effective leadership is the ability to get others to follow. It is being empathic, understanding, and a good listener. That is how you get people to follow and to be engaged. It's about the ability to inspire and motivate. Leadership requires decision making. It takes courage to decide and to take action. Courage comes through experience, facing challenges, and learning from them.

*"Learn from the mistakes of others. You can't live long enough to make them all yourself."*  
Eleanor Roosevelt

**How important were mentors early in your career?**

I did not have a mentor in the way the term is commonly used today. There were no individuals guiding me through my career by offering advice, making suggestions, or intentionally setting professional examples. Instead, I learned something more fundamental early on from my parents. They consistently demonstrated strong moral values and courage, which became the foundation for how I approach both my work and my life. Rather than mentorship through instruction, I learned through example – an influence that has shaped me more powerfully than traditional mentorship ever could.

*"A ship is safer in a harbor, but that is not what ships are built for."*  
John A. Shedd

**What are the qualities you look for when building a management team?**

A leader has followers. To have followers

you must communicate clearly. I have often quoted Senator Bill Bradley, the former Knicks player, who said that a coach is great when everyone knows what you want and a great leader compiles a team not with the best players, but with the players who fit together best. A leader must be self-confident. If you don't believe in yourself, why should others.

*"Whenever you are asked if you can do a job, tell 'em, 'Certainly I can!' Then get busy and find out how to do it."*  
Theodore Roosevelt



Adrienne Arsht and Madame Christine Lagarde, President of the European Central Bank

**How do you define success?**

Success is losing three pounds. Success is a judgment given by others. My energy and thoughts are focused on what is next.

*"I shall be telling this with a sigh. Somewhere ages and ages hence: Two roads diverged in a wood, and I took – I took the one less traveled by, and that has made all the difference."*  
Robert Frost

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

To young people beginning their journeys, I want to say this: obstacles are inevitable. But staying still won't get you anywhere. When you hit a wall, don't freeze – rethink your plan. And if that new plan doesn't work, try another. There is always another path forward. Don't give up. Persistence is key. Don't take "NO" personally.

*"Ability may get you to the top, but it takes character to keep you there"*  
John Wooden

*"What seems challenging now will someday be your warm-up" – Unknown*

**"Courage comes through experience, facing challenges, and learning from them."**