

Why Ivanka Trump calls Trump Hotels CEO Eric Danziger 'Ed'

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At a meeting one morning at Trump Tower—not *that* meeting—Ivanka Trump, Donald Trump Jr., Eric Trump and Eric Danziger were huddled in a conference room discussing their hotel business. At one point, Ivanka asked Eric a question. What she got in return was a synchronized answer. With two Erics in the room, that is bound to happen. Ivanka, the decider, decided that there couldn't be more than one Eric, and she wasn't about to get rid of her bother. Ivanka turned to Eric (Danziger), sized him up and said, "Now, you are 'Ed.'" The CEO of Trump Hotels lost his name, reduced to a moniker derived from his convenient initials.

Reduction partly describes Danziger's first two years at the helm of a group that carries such a polarizing name. When he took the job, in August 2015, it was only two months after now President Donald Trump's fabled escalator ride at Trump Tower to announce his candidacy. At that point, there were multitudinous Republican candidates and a Trump White House was to most of Americans, Danizger likely included, unlikely. But that's why there are elections.

Two years later, Danziger is dealing with the aftermath and it's clear that Trump's ascension to the most important and powerful job in the world hasn't made his life as a hotelier easy. There's the constant chatter, of course, but also a leash: While Trump is in office, hotel brand development cannot be pursued outside the U.S. Doing just that was part of the

reason Danziger had originally been tapped for the job; growing brands is something he is darn good at, with a track record to prove it. Stints leading such hotel companies as Wyndham Hotel Group and Starwood Hotels & Resorts are evidence.

Danziger, during a conversation with Daniel Lesser, CEO of LW Hospitality Advisors, at Bisnow's NYC Hospitality Investment and Development Summit, said he didn't have any opinion on Trump winning the election. His victory, however, "changed our focus," Danziger said. "Now, we are dealing with the noise."

Tough Sledding

Danziger is an American success story and has made a tidy fortune in the hospitality industry; not too shabby for a guy with no college degree and a resume that lists bellboy as first job. In public, he is self-deprecating. "I'm a simple hotel guy" is a frequent refrain of his. His job now is anything but, to his chagrin, uncomplicated. He is often sought out for the sensation of being entangled with the Trump name, when hotels and hotel development, one infers, is all he really wants to talk about. Upon Trump's win, Danziger still believed that it wouldn't affect the business. How wrong he was.

"The reality is we had to walk away from 47 international deals for the Trump brand," Danziger said, ticking off such destinations as Tel Aviv, Munich and Amsterdam. Getting luxury deals done is tough enough and walking away from almost 50 potential deals is an about-face from a lot of potential money. Most Trump hotel deals are license agreements, whereby a hotel owner pays Trump Hotels a fee in exchange for using the name.

A kibosh on Trump hotel deals outside the U.S. made Danziger rethink the famously one-brand group. For years, prior to the circus, the Trump name carried cachet the world over. Now, it was a pejorative to many, and something, regardless of politics, many business people avoided in fear of backlash. Recent setbacks have included the loss of [Trump Soho](#) and [Trump Toronto](#).

In order to grow, then, Danziger needed new brands. Born were, first, Scion, then American Idea: two brands conspicuous for lack of Trump mention. Scion is a four-star brand, while American Idea, envisioned as a conversion brand, will play below as a more budget-friendly option, which is un-Trump, to be sure. American Idea, as Danziger put it, was the brainchild of Trump's sons, who, while on the campaign trail, often in small American towns, found that there were no viable lodging options beyond the many economy and midscale brands that dot the American landscape.

How fast the brands are growing is still vague. A Trump Hotels spokesperson said they are working on a few deals, beyond announced deals in Cleveland, Miss., for an American Idea hotel and Scion hotel. Two American Idea hotels are expected to open later this year as is the Scion in Cleveland, being developed by Chawla Hotels, the spokesperson said.

Past and Future Moves

Danziger's success launching and growing brands stretches back years to when he was an executive with Doubletree Hotels, in 1984, prior to its acquisition by Hilton in the Promus Hotel Corporation deal. At DoubleTree, Danziger came up with the idea of giving a warm cookie to each hotel guest, a confectionary custom that is still in practice at the hotels today. (That's 437 calories of goodness, Danziger said.) Small, innovative touches like that were an early indication of the idea of experiential travel that was still to come.

He has had his setbacks, including one year at Hampshire Hotels, which operates the Dream Hotels brand. There, Danziger tried to rebrand the group under the name Debut Hotel Group, with a group of lifestyle-oriented brands. It fizzled out and Danziger moved on.

Danziger is content at Trump Hotels, for now. In fact, his boss, the President of the United States, might want to take a lesson from him on the art of the deal. "It's about what matters to you, what matters to me, then let's find commonalities," he said.

The one obstacle could be Danziger himself. He's famously impatient—"If I have a 6 PM reservation, sit me at 6 PM," he said—and his tolerance for impediments to hotel development is low. Trump Hotels is not Marriott or Hilton; deals take longer to come together and get off the ground. Moving at a glacial pace is not something that will sit well with this CEO.

While Danziger does not publicize his politics, his biggest idol is one of the great politicians and presidents of all time: John F. Kennedy. Danziger's fandom toward JFK borders on hysteric: he owns a pair of the late president's sunglasses, a pair of cufflinks and anyone who has ever stepped foot in his office can't miss the massive painting of JFK hanging on the wall. In fact, that very painting was the first thing Donald Trump saw when he walked into Danziger's office the first time. "I'm a fan of leadership," Danziger said.

In this moment, Danziger says that he's never seen the hotel business this healthy for this long. "But it will end," he said. Now, then, is the time for Trump Hotels to grow its new brands, before it's too late. In the meantime, Danziger's next moves are undecided. But he will certainly listen to his heart. "It's why God gave us two ears and one mouth," he said.