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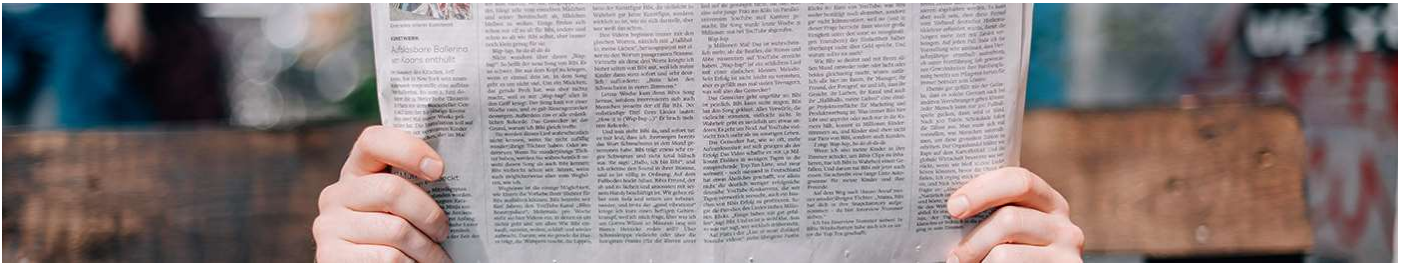
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Nike's Former Brand Boss Visits USU

October 15, 2018

Charlie Denson, Marketing '78, former president of Nike Brand, led a Leadership Forum attended by more than 250 students. The forum focused on Denson's impressive career with Nike and his extensive experience in building and leading one of the world's best-known brands.

Denson began his career in management at his family's business while in high school. He described the skills in profit/loss and customer service that he learned at Denson Feed, which he would later apply during his time at Nike. Denson began at Utah State soon after and would play on the Utah State football team. Football would have a heavy influence on his professional career, teaching him valuable skills in leadership, discipline, strategy, and working on a team.



"There is a big difference between playing as an individual and playing a role on a team," Denson told students. "My time playing football taught me to know how to work in a team and when it is appropriate to work as an individual."

After graduating, Denson accepted a position as assistant manager at a small Nike store in Oregon. Nike was only a small brick-and-mortar at the time; Denson was the 103rd employee hired by the company. "Everyone knew each other and the executives were heavily involved in the company," Denson said of the young company.

Although he thought the job with Nike would be a short stint, Denson remained with the company for over 30 years. After his time as a store manager, Denson moved into the sales portion of Nike, which would take him around the world to represent the growing company.

"After ten years as a sales rep, I soon realized that the company would soon be global," said Denson. "I accepted a position in Amsterdam. It was a step into a whole different realm which opened up new opportunities that would lead me to become president of the brand." He stressed the importance of gaining international experience and being exposed to diverse cultures. "It was a good dose of everything I didn't know. Just because there is a right way to solve a problem in the US, it doesn't necessarily mean it is the right way to solve a problem in other cultures."

Shortly after his time abroad, Denson became the president of the Nike brand. His focus was on how to manage the incredible growth of the company, including growth into digital and social media spheres. He launched a MySpace campaign for the 2006 World Cup that would allow teenagers from around the world create their own Nike commercials and ads.

Denson also had the privilege to develop several of the most popular ads ever distributed by Nike. He spoke fondly of a [TV commercial campaign involving Michael Jordan and Spike Lee featuring Nike shoes](#).

Denson ended his speech discussing the societal impact of some recent marketing campaigns. The first was a [commercial featuring Tiger Woods](#) Denson played a significant role in the development of the ad.

The [most recent campaign](#) featured NFL athlete Colin Kaepernick. "I liked the ad," Denson said of the Kaepernick ad. "I was proud of them for doing it. I think the most important part of the ad was that it created a conversation." According to Denson, in Nike's advertising, the marketing teams prefer to "acknowledge the elephant in the room" rather than ignore it.

Denson closed his remarks by taking student questions and offering insights for students entering large companies. He encourages them to be passionate and enjoy the people they work with. He concluded by saying, "Being in charge of your own destiny is better than having someone else in charge of it."

