

Disney TV Animation's Mover and Shaker

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One of the first things you notice about Eric Coleman, senior VP of original series at Disney Television Animation, is his strong handshake.

"Coleman shakes like he means it, which is pretty much how he does everything else as well," says Alex Hirsch, creator of Disney's *Gravity Falls*.

The industry vet joined DTVA in 2008, hit the ground running and has since led development of series such as *Gravity Falls* and *Wander Over Yonder* and rebooted shorts starring Mickey Mouse. In doing so, he effectively turned the pitch-driven Mouse House upside down.

"My guiding principle is simple: great art comes from great artists," Coleman says. At DTVA, "I made it my first priority to build our studio into the first-choice home for the best artists in town."

He has done so by encouraging creators to share their viewpoints through peer reviews and executive producer roundtables, fostering an environment where everyone can be comfortable.

"Eric is a champion of artists," says Gary Marsh, president and chief creative officer for Disney Channel Worldwide. "You have to believe in their vision... that is Eric's gift as an executive. There's probably not a single executive in the animation industry who has the artistic bandwidth, the storytelling insights and the managerial finesse that Eric has."

Coleman's appreciation for the arts blossomed when he was a junior at Duke University. The English literature major spent a year abroad, diving into art for six months in Florence, Italy, and then literature for six months in London.

After graduation—followed by a year traveling across Nepal, Southeast Asia, Australia and New Zealand—Coleman returned to the U.S. with a thirst for working in a creative field. He snuck into a symposium, did some networking, got some advice from an MTV exec and, in time, was able to get an assistant position at Nickelodeon in the animation department, where he had a front-row seat for the evolution of shows such as *Ren & Stimpy* and *Rugrats*.

"I fell in love with animation when I started to appreciate how it is a combination of so many art forms," Coleman says. "I was realizing animation is a [mixture] of painting and graphic design, writing, music and acting."

An inspired Coleman quickly rose up the Nick ranks and soon found himself doing development work on *SpongeBob SquarePants*, which taught him the importance of a creator's vision and an appreciation of character over concept.

"If you create a character that's lovable and memorable, it's much more powerful than creating a situation or set-up you have to keep returning to," he says.

The beloved *SpongeBob* also taught Coleman to embrace the nervousness that comes with taking a chance. "If the fundamentals are solid but it just seems unusual or uncertain, then take the risk," he says.

Pitching Perfection

Coleman has sat through his fair share of pitches, and that, along with his experience, has honed the vision of where he sees DTVA going. "We're looking for people who can create specific and authentic characters," he says. "It's easy to ask for. It's hard to accomplish. But when you see it, these characters jump off the page. They jump off the screen."



Eric Coleman

Title:

Senior VP,
original series,
Disney Television
Animation

Education:

B.A., English
literature, Duke
University, 1990

Employment Highlights:

Assistant to the
VP of animation,
Nickelodeon,
1992-93

Coordinator,
current series,
Nickelodeon,
1993-95

Manager of
development,
Nickelodeon,
1995-97

Executive
in charge of
production,

The animation veteran is currently developing the new animated series *Star and the Forces of Evil* and *Penn Zero: Part-Time Hero*, both due next year.

Beyond work, Coleman has plenty of other things keeping him on his toes, namely two young children, Sean, 2, and Aaron, 5 months—with his wife, Kelley. When he catches a breath, his at-home viewing staple is *The Daily Show With Jon Stewart*.

But there's always time for his colleagues at Disney who keep the creative flowing.

"Eric, even though he's incredibly busy, when you do get your time with him, he gives you his focus and he gives you his attention," says Hirsch. "And that is really valuable."

Nickelodeon,
1997-2003

VP, animation
development
and production,
Nickelodeon,
2003-08

Current title
since 2008

Personal:

Born Feb. 24,
1968; married
to Kelley; sons
Sean, 2, and
Aaron, 5 months;
dog, Nelly