

InD'tale!

Magazine

An Intimate
Conversation With
The Mega-Career
Coach,

Robin
Blakely



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InD: Let's lay a foundation, because I think you offer such an incredibly good service, but I don't think that many have any idea what that service is, why they need it or what you do.

I have heard the word "career coach" and the word "PR" used interchangeably. It can be this kind of big nebulous thing, but your service is much different, yet so vitally important. I don't think people have any idea how great your help can be, if they could tap into it.

First of all, let's give everybody a description of exactly what you do, in a nutshell?

RB: Well, our clients typically have been told to come here by somebody. They've been told, "You need PR" or "You need some kind of help." When they get here, I am interested in discussing where they are in the bigger picture. I am always looking at what they are trying to build here and what are their skill gaps and where are their strengths?

InD: Do you call yourself a "career coach"...is that a title that you gave yourself?

RB: Well, I do a tremendous amount of coaching and I do a lot of PR for folks, but we are always leveraging PR toward their growth. I see writers and artists as talent driven brands, so I am looking at the brand they are trying to build, and the books or the art are products of that brand. My role is to consistently figure out what they are trying to build.

InD: Let's get into the business itself first. What you are trying to do with your packages? On your website for Creative Center of America, I see you have three different options of help: "Creative Academy", "Talent Institute", and "Innovation Studio".

RB: People come to us at all different stages in their career. They are not sure where they stand or how

much is it going to cost. PR is a difficult field for people to get what they pay for, because it is not advertising. Advertising is when you buy an ad. You know what you bought, you know where it is going to land

and you know when it is going to be seen. You don't know if anybody is going to do anything about it, but at least you have that.

In PR, there is not a promise behind it. The way that I deal with PR is to help the writer or artist continue to grow and help them become more financially stable and more profitable, but a person also needs to understand how to use PR to get that growth, so I handle PR differently than a lot of PR people do.

We package the things so people can understand. At this particular price point, they get this. At the next price point, they get a more hands on service.

Then, when they are more seasoned and successful, they may have very sophisticated issues going on, like licensing issues.

InD: That is why I like the moniker "career coach". I don't think I would consider you a PR person. You are helping somebody's career get to where they want it to be in every area, not just basic marketing.

RB: That is correct, but people don't understand it unless we use the term PR, because PR is usually what they are told they are missing.

InD: It was interesting when I was looking over your packages, they are set up very well, so you can see very precisely and very clearly the different areas that one may need and can be coached in. The first, or "Creative Academy", is the first time novice coming in, is that correct?

RB: There is a time when someone is starting out or starting over. At that moment in time, there is often a need to regroup and get things pulled together and

there is usually a limited amount of funds. That package is meant to help them understand the tools of what they need and what kind of goals to be setting; how to be ready with their social media; how to get some of the specific things they need in place so they can be successful when they are trying to get the PR. There is a lot of prep and a lot of activity for them to do to get ready to fly. I wanted something that would get the foundational stuff under their feet and not be too expensive. Because they can do a lot of it themselves, and at the start out or start over stage, they really need to know where everything is.

InD: The next package up is the "Talent Institute". Is it the next step up or is it a completely different focus?

RB: It follows the same chart or same plan or path

The "Talent Institute" is a one on one, take them by the hand and move them through that same process, individually. More attention, more private sessions, and they get some of the PR and creative tools we create for them. We do some of the social media strategy and some of the heavy lifting because they are paying us, too.

InD: So, the "Talent Institute" you take them by the hand and help them do it.

RB: Correct. I not only tell them how and show them what we are doing, but we create the tools they need. They don't have to worry if it is good enough or if they did it right because we are going to create it for them. And of course, I have an enormous database and it has an eagle nest inclusion to send it out to a target media list for them.

InD: It goes from there to the "Innovation Studio". Where does that come in?

RB: At the "Innovation Studio" level, authors or artists usually have a lot of books, or a lot of art and a lot of acclaim; there is a track record there. They have succeeded in many ways, but the landscape has changed and they are not sure how to sustain it...especially the ones who were successful in the 90's or the early 2000's. Many are going, "Wow, I don't know how to do this anymore!"

There are layers that can be built on the platform they have, because they are in a different situation. If they have 20 books and they have won awards, there are many things they could be doing, that a new person can't. There are other frontiers to go get. How do you expand the audience correctly without changing who they are? There are different elements to it that must be considered at that higher end.

InD: What are some of the things you are planning for the future?

RB: For authors, we are expanding our networks of independent bookstores, and not just the big bookstores.

InD: I bet it has really been interesting and quite a challenge now with all of the big book stores that are going out of business. It would be a challenge to develop new ways market and showcase authors now!

RB: Correct. We have been doing this for so long that you can't even imagine some of the stuff that's no longer available because the landscape and licensing has changed. It is an interesting time.

InD: So, how have you readjusted since there aren't any bookstores? What are the new areas you have found that you are working with?

RB: Obviously, the biggest difference is availability, having everything online and making sure that you have a strong digital presence and reaching out

consistently and making sure your brand is understood online. That is the biggest difference.

InD: Your focus has changed from getting authors into bookstores, to making sure that they have a digital presence that is seen everywhere?

RB: Right, and that they understand what PR opportunities are really worth your effort and what ones aren't. I happen to like the independent publishing. I still have ties to my traditional publishing folks and I love what they are trying to do, but from a business standpoint, it makes much more sense if you are capable of publishing your own stuff. You have a better chance of building that brand and controlling it. If you go through the traditional publisher, your product is a part of their family not yours; you are sharing that brand. You have to figure out how to make that work.

I do a lot of coaching and counseling on whether someone should go into a traditional stream or an independent stream—and every single time, it depends on what their skill sets are and what their capacity is. If they are going to be drowned by all of the demands of independent publishing, they need to go through the traditional channel. If they are going to be just robbed through the traditional channel, then they shouldn't do that. We have to help them understand what the choices are and why one would be better than the other.

InD: From your extensive business experience, what do you see is the biggest mistake people make when starting or trying to grow their business?

RB: They look at their craft from a creative standpoint, they don't think of it as a business. They see it as, "This thing that I have to do, like I have to breathe, that's why I write." I understand that. I get that. I know they tend to think they aren't really a business, because they're not like other businesses,

and they are right...but, the business world doesn't see it that way. They don't have to stop being creative and just do math.

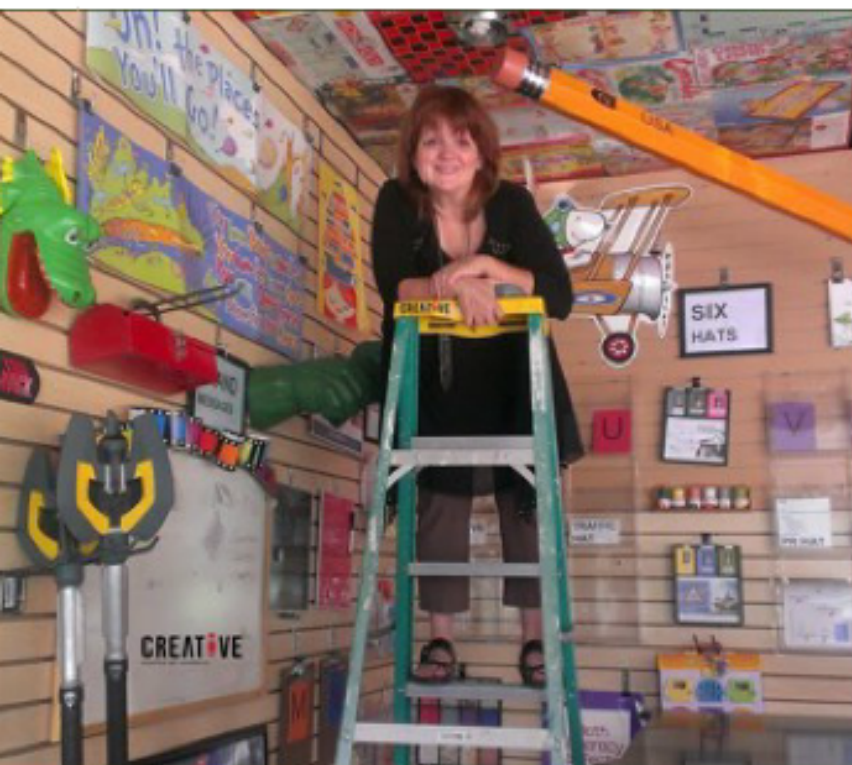
This is an incredible time to make a business and be your own business and make it what you want it to be. I think the biggest misconception creative people have is they think they must like Mr. Potter in "It's a Wonderful Life"...mean or harsh or they are nothing. It's not like that, and doesn't have to be like that, at all. That is the biggest mistake.

InD: If you could give only one bit of advice to any customer who walks in your door, what would that advice be?

RB: I guess the advice would be, they need to explore what is out there. What the options are, then make specific choices about what they want to do. This is a career without boundaries!

It is tough when you have a framework already in place. At Disney, a person can start in the mailroom and you can climb the ladder and wind up in the corner office. But in this boundary-less career, like a writer or artist has, there is no mailroom or stairs or corner office. You have to envision it, build it and then climb it. And that can be overwhelming for some folks.

Yet, if they approach it as a business and not just drift through it, they can really be successful. They don't have to be poor or suffer for their art. They can really become successful, if they want to be. The other part is that the business side can be really fun. It's a really great place to let your imagination run, you don't have to leave it at the door. The more you bring that imagination and intuition into the business side of this creativity thing, the better you



for everybody. At this stage, they have to know who their target market is and who they are, so we help them understand how to navigate potential buyers through "awareness area to engagement". When they get to engagement, they need to either buy a product or buy its service, or tell people about them. There is a naturally flowing path that needs to happen for every single writer and artist, but where a client is when they show up here is the mystery. It could be they have a bunch of these pieces in place or none of them. Many people are very talented and may have something, but don't have any of the platform builds, so the "Creative Academy" gives them a good understanding and some of the tools they'll need to start building a platform.



will be. I don't think many know that.

InD: I would agree with you. We pigeonhole, then separate our business and our creative side. I don't think most of us combine the two.

RB: Someone was telling me they were challenged by the notion that, if they wanted money, they did not have a pure heart for their art. Well, creative people didn't start that mess! That was started by the business people so they could control the creative people! Most of them do have a pure heart, and when you get down to it, they may need and want money, but they aren't doing it because of the money. They are doing it because they love it. When they are accused with, "If you really love it, you don't need a thing..." that is a crummy business person taking advantage!

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InD: And on the other side if this were truly your “business”, it would be business always.

RB: Yeah, that is a harsh way of business that I don't like. I think people need to come first. When I put an agreement together, I tell them, “There is going to be a checklist in this agreement so you can see what I am doing and know that it was done at the end of it. Then you and I can agree that I did what I promised for the money you paid.” These are often sensitive, kind-hearted

business situation, are afraid to talk about money, yet they sense something is wrong. If you think something is wrong, turn on the light and ask more questions. That is how you make everything OK for you. So, the problem I see for a lot of these folks is fear that they shouldn't be demanding money or that somehow they are not good enough.

InD: Isn't that interesting. Why do you think that is?

RB: I think that there are certain folks in the classic business world who are driven by money and how much they can get—

who cares who gets hurt. That instilling of fear is a tactic that works on a creative person. “I guess you are not really passionate or really pure about your art, if you are so worried about money...” it's an arrow that someone can throw and it will always hit the heart of a writer or an artist. It is an unfailing weapon for a business person to use. It is the worst, but often it makes the writer accept a lower price. It makes the artist hand over their art for free. It is awful but it works.

InD: I never thought about that, but that is true. It is either, you are passionate and you do it for free, or it is a business and you do it for the money.

RB: That is often what is said. It is not true. Sometimes they are a vulnerable population in that regard. It can be awful for them.

InD: So, you teach them they can be very passionate and very creative, and still expect to be paid well for it.

RB: Correct. But it does take a different outlook. One of the questions I ask up front in a coaching session is, “What is your relationship with money?” They will usually say, “I need money, but I hate having to deal with money” But I need to know

they at least have a respect for money. I don't care if they love money or not, but they have to respect it. A lot of the times, they say they just don't want to know about it. They want to ignore that issue. That is not a healthy relationship with money. You have to at least be able to talk about it and be able to ask people for it when it is time, if they owe it to you, or at least know someone else who can talk about it on your behalf.

InD: Nurture their talent and passion, then help them become successful with it...

RB: Yeah. It has to be protected and cultivated. Some people are more skilled than others to do that for themselves. I love this group of people! How they think and how they operate, they are fun!

InD: You've just published a book, also, “Crossing the Troll Bridge” is a marketing book for...

RB: It is a marketing guide for artists and writers, an illustrated marketing guide.

It goes through and explains the entire way for writers or artists to understand what a talent driven brand looks like, and how they are different than potato chips or shoes when they are trying to market themselves. It is just a bigger way of understanding how

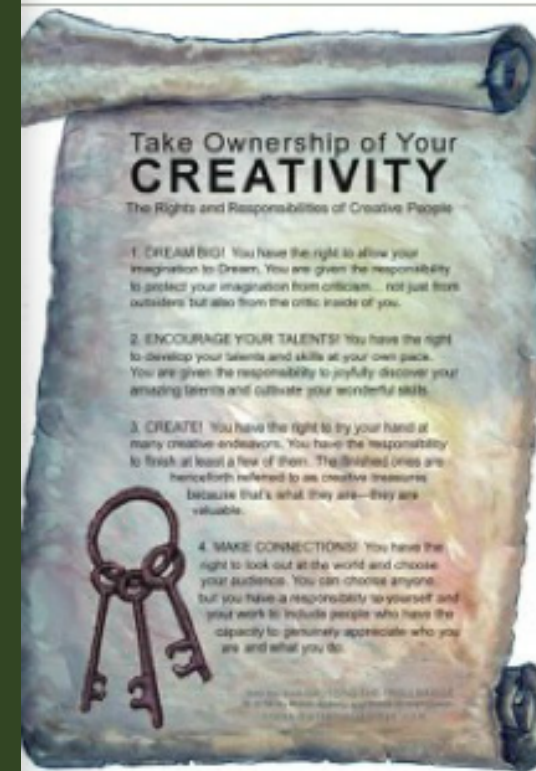
to deal with the marketing process. So many people are injured by that process when they are creative. It is really fun and I have a fantasy artist.

InD: Oh, how cool! Is it in print or an eBook?

RB: It is a full color book. You can download it in a PDF edition and it is a print on demand, so you can get a paper version of it. It looks really great. I am excited about it.

InD: I bet that took a lot of work.

RB: Three years of work.



folks, and they just need to be treated fairly, and that doesn't always happen in the world at large.

InD: I totally agree. I have found from personal experience, we learn the hard way.

RB: Yeah, I will tell them, “Look, if nobody else is going to treat you the way that I am treating you, then you walk away from them.” That is the best thing to do. Make everyone explain. Don't be afraid of that. So many creative people, when in a

InD: Good grief!

RB: Yeah, it goes through and simplifies the concepts using the metaphor of a creative castle, and what they need to know about it. If anyone is a creative person, they need to set aside a very sacred place to learn about their creativity, dreams, etc. in what we call the dreamer's tower. There is also a doer's workshop where they can have people who may help by mentoring, constructive criticism, that sort of stuff.

There are two other areas that people don't often understand,

in the process. So much of what they are creating is a part of them that they are putting out there in the market place. It is different than manufacturing shoes or tooth brushes. Proper marketing is not always understood by the creative person.

InD: Whether it is art or books or whatever, they are putting a part of themselves out there rather than developing something on the outside. I understand.

RB: That is right. The resources out there explain how to market, as if it wasn't a part of them, so the part that gets missed is how to take care of themselves. To own the creativity, to own that brand in a different way that makes it exciting, fun, and healthy for them as they go through the process of developing art or books, and getting it out to the market. It is a grueling process and if they don't take care of themselves, the whole factory can close down because of the harshness of trying to get to the market.

InD: Three years ago what gave you the idea to write a book like this?

RB: Well, I have been working with clients in this field and with this issue since 1995, so it is not a new concept, but I had gotten

to a point that I had, what I thought was a wonderful chart. It was embraced by a lot of people, but when I was trying to explain this particular chart to Frank (our artist) that he needed his marketing to be done in a different way...I was encouraging him to do this—what I wanted him to do—he hated the chart. HATED it! It was like, "I can't look. It is making my eyes hurt." He couldn't stand it! He just wouldn't do it. I would show it to him this way. I would show it to him that way, I would mark the chart with him.

Now, I knew Frank loved fantasy and had been working on the project, "The Three Billy Goats Gruff" so I knew he loved trolls and castles and that sort of stuff, so we started chatting and decided we would make the concept something he could love to look at and understand. That is how the book came about, but it took three years.

InD: It is great in concept and it is great in theory, but then you have to get all of the illustrations and make the concept look like what you are imagining.

RB: Yeah, he illustrated it the way I was imagining it, though. We wanted the art to be really memorable. There are several moments where anyone can look at this and go, "Oh my God, I feel exactly like that!" There is a point where the artist or author is so excited, being in that castle and creating their own stuff and doing that kind of thing, that the concept of, when they are working up in that tower to create whatever they are creating, that castle gets kind of over grown and foreboding to the rest of the world. No one wants to go there, and the artist wonders why no one wants to show up.

There is a big moment in the book when they can see the difference between how the world sees them—and what they need to look like to them—what the public image needs to look like. There are lots of moments that help them understand. The metaphor for the troll is fear. In crossing the troll bridge, they are overcoming that fear to reach out to the community and to be working with the world. The troll represents all the difficulties and fears they have. Most of the time they just have to come to a point where they look the troll in the eye and say, "This is what I am going to do" That is the

moment for a lot of writers. They are just afraid to market themselves.

They see what it is really about, there is a process that helps them. There is that moment, because they have such big imaginations, they are often afraid of things that aren't based on reality. Creative people can imagine bigger, scarier things than what may really exist. We go through that, and help them understand what is common and what is normal, for a writer or an artist. That is a really fun thing!

InD: How did you get into this?
RB: I got into marketing and publicity because I used to be a news writer. Then I was a producer of a radio talk show where I did a lot of freelance writing for a publicity company in Beverly Hills. People either knew me from the talk show or from the publicity work that I was doing, so they ended up coming to me, asking advice. I just started building a business from that. That was back in the 90's. I guess my focus has always been writers and artists. Those are the people I love, the folks that I care most about. They are passionate people. They have creativity and they are very bright. I enjoy being around them.

When I was producing talk shows, I used to invite them to be guests on the programs. There, I had that opportunity to see how they were presenting themselves. I worked with publishers to get different folks on, so I got to see things from that side of the table, and in the process I wanted to help them represent themselves better. Over the years, I have just gone farther and farther with these folks!

Now, I have worked on every stage of a book, from the concept to reinventing it. I have worked on almost every genre of

book, with large and small publishers, for hundreds of books and loads of authors and artists. Through it, I have developed a sense of how to help them grow quickly and build their brand. It is kind of a grilling process, so sometimes we have to be very careful about how they are cultivating their talent.

InD: When did you say, "Let's turn this into an actual company?" Did you name it Creative Center of America to start with?

RH: No, it's had several variations of names over the years. Creative Center of America came into existence three years ago, when I went through a divorce. I had to close everything that had been before and start again. It also allowed for Richard Jordan from Disney Studios to be part of what I am doing.

InD: So, the new business was the same type of business, just renamed and rebranded?

RB: Renamed, rebranded, and repositioned a little bit. Now, it's exactly the way I wanted it to be. It was an absolutely wonderful time to start our roots and say this is who we are. So, it is a pretty exciting time for me.

InD: Tell us who Richard is, and how he came into it and what his part of it is.

RB: Richard Tyler Jordan, is the Vice President here at Creative Center of America. What he brings to the company is an incredible background with Walt Disney Studio. He was a Senior Publicity Executive there for thirty some years. He retired from there and has come to work for me! This is just such a really wonderful time because he has written so much material: press kits, canned articles, bios, and interviews...all these different things. He has worked on about 450 movies, so to have him, brings all that experience to the

table. I promoted his book. We have an awful lot of fun together.

InD: So, he was one of your clients and you started Creative Center of America. How did he get to be Vice President of your company going from that many years of Disney?

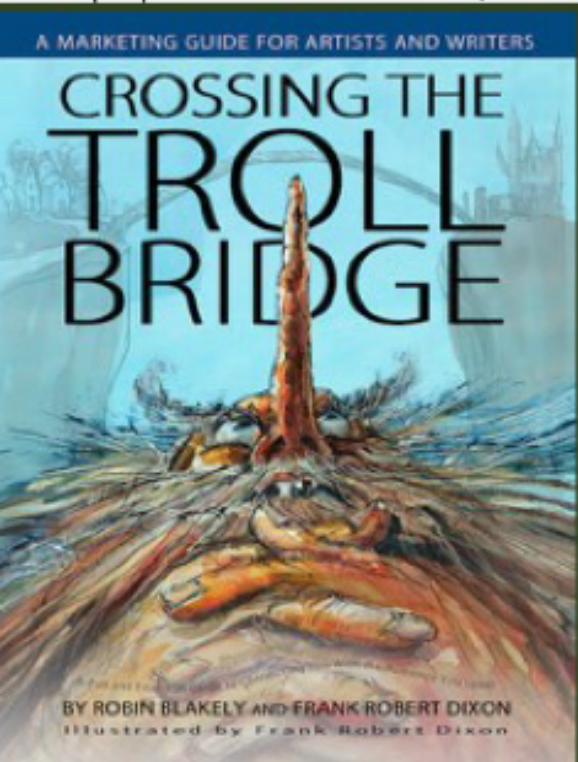
RB: He had left Disney and I had called to wish him a happy birthday, we had a nice conversation and I jokingly said, "Why don't you come and work for me?" And he said, "I just might do that." I said, "Do it!" He said, "How quickly do you want



me there?" I said, "Tomorrow!"

InD: Then what?

RB: He came back a week or two later, and he looked everything over, we talked about it, I set everything up so he could see what we were trying to do and build, so he would know exactly what he would be getting into. He said, "I like what you are doing and I want to give it a run. Let's do it!" and so we did! And we have had a grand time.



and that is, they need to have a telescope tower where they are actually looking out into the world and choosing their audience, knowing why they are creating and those they are creating for. Then there is where they prepare to invite folks in, to enjoy this treasure of work that they have created.

As they start going through this book and looking at the process, it starts helping their brand emerge. My role is to help people understand how to be a brand and understand how to market it without getting injured