

Mastering the art of business success

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Turning artists into creative entrepreneurs involves teaching them the simple A-B-C's of the language of business and opening their eyes to the enormous opportunities that come with being financially savvy.

The idea that real artists are poor and unable to function in the real world is not only outdated and unrealistic - but also patronising and uninformed. Many artists are successful not only artistically but financially as well, contributing to society and the economy on broader issues of innovation and design, says Elaine Rumboll, an award-winning poet and businesswoman herself.

"The bottom line is, if you don't have a country of artists, you won't have a culture of innovation and then you can't grow as a nation. Therefore we need to invest in people who are able to grow that vision," says Rumboll who convenes the Business Acumen for Artists executive education course at the University of Cape Town Graduate School of Business (UCT GSB).

Rumboll says too many misconceptions surround the world of art as well as the world of business. She likes the famous quote by Andy Warhol, an artist who also excelled in business, who stated that being good in business was the most fascinating kind of art and that good business was the best art.

"In order to be sustainable as an artist, you need to understand business language. It really is just a language like any other," says Rumboll. The course teaches creative professionals from illustrators to filmmakers and designers to writers and painters, everything they need to know about basic business - from how to manage their finances and marketing themselves more effectively and critically, to negotiating with others and handling practical situations involving commercial decisions surrounding their art.

Participants emerge more confident and as a result are able to be more productive and are not so vulnerable to exploitation. The course benefits from the input of well-known and popular lecturers like digital marketing specialist Dave Duarte, and Maximillian Kaizen, an expert in the relationship between the creative and commercial spaces, as well as Paul Galantis, marketing director and co-founder of successful online business Yuppiechef.

Rumboll says the course, which is currently in its eighth year, is very popular and boasts some impressive success stories, like Renée Roussouw, a designer and pattern maker, whose innovative ideas and signature patterns have made quite a name for their creator in the design world.

Another success story is that of Karin Rae Matthee, who founded her successful Dear Rae jewellery business after completing the course. "In many instances it is about learning how to delight your customer," says Rumboll, explaining that for many artists there is a lot of resentment initially around the idea of commercial success.

"It is not a neutral space. Many people feel they have been ripped off in the past or used by people in industry. So there is a terrible tension here. There is a perception that people who are successful have sold out, while those whose work is not known, feel that no one likes them or gets their work."

"To move from being an artist to being a creative entrepreneur takes an enormous leap of faith, courage and bravery. It is a lot of work and self-work, which is woven into the course material," says Rumboll.

Furthering innovation and supporting entrepreneurship is one of the cornerstones of the UCT Graduate School of Business. Africa's top business school is constantly seeking ways to encourage entrepreneurial mindsets and explore new ideas around adding value especially in emerging market economies.

"The GSB believes that innovation and entrepreneurship are absolutely vital for economic growth in South Africa and for the African continent; our programmes are designed to address unique challenges and offer participants the opportunity for authentic development," says Kumeshnee West, senior manager of executive education at the UCT GSB.

Rumboll herself is passionate about educational and leadership development. "I am a staunch believer in the power of education to change people and empower them. I have seen it many times on this programme and I am constantly working on ensuring it has an impact and gives people what they need."

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