



Episode 41



David H. Lawrence XVII

David H. Lawrence XVII is an actor, writer, comedian, and radio personality, based in Los Angeles. His radio show, The David Lawrence Show, airs in numerous markets and on satellite radio. David was an original founder of the American Comedy Network. For more than a decade, he hosted Online Tonight, a technology-oriented radio show.

Voiceover This is Business Reimagined. Every week we talk with thought leaders and revolutionaries who are bringing innovation to their industries, like today's guest, David H. Lawrence XVII.

David *This idea of, if I'm just really good at my art, somebody, somewhere, will notice me. You know who's going to notice you? The person you tell about yourself. The person you make sure knows about you. That's who's going to "discover" you.*

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Danny

David H. Lawrence XVII is an actor on major hit shows like "Heroes", a prolific radio personality, and, most of all, an artist. Not just on stage or behind the microphone, but also in the business of his art. When David talks about what it takes to make it as an artist in today's technology-driven world, it would be smart to sit up and take notes. For him, the passion of being an artist started young.

David

I'd been fascinated with radio and with television and movies. I loved all of that. But when I watched this movie, and watched Jackie Gleason act this role of a janitor in France who was accused of a sex crime. He was deaf, he was mute, so he wasn't saying anything, he was only using his face and tears were streaming down my cheeks. I didn't know why.

Danny

David's experience with this superpower that actor seem to possess led him to want it for himself, but it was a slow burn, taking about 35 years to realize. Despite his early fascination with acting, David performance career began in radio, where he stayed for over three decades. It wasn't until his 40s that he finally went after his childhood dream of acting. When David moved to LA to make that leap, he brought with him a competitive edge that Jackie Gleason never dreamed of, that has carried David through the present day: technology.



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David

If you've read "The Outliers", I was just like Bill Gates and just like Bill Joy, sitting in my high school computer room with a Teletype hooked up to a mainframe, a Univac 1108. I would look up, and it was already midnight. I'd been in there since 8 in the morning.

Danny

What you might not have known about David is, in addition to working with almost every major television network, he also worked for just as many technology companies, including America Online in the early days, Yahoo, Google, and even NASA. How's technology a competitive edge in art and creation?

David

It just happened to work out that these two pursuits were very complementary to each other. We've seen it in the industry. People that are successful are taking advantage, in my industry of performance, they're taking advantage of technology all over the place. The people that aren't are the people that are suffering.

Danny

David doesn't want to see people suffering. As a working actor, he also spends a good portion of his time teaching others. Not just the art itself, but also this revolutionary approach that all artist, and all entrepreneurs, can use to be successful in a technology-driven world that never stops changing.



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David

What I've found is I work best when I take advantage of observable realities, whether they're counter intuitive or not. One definition of success that I give to my clients is: do more of what works and less of what doesn't. You can't help but be more successful as time goes on, knowing what works and what doesn't, as opposed to thinking, "That probably works... I don't think that works". Find out for sure. As I was thinking about this over the last few years, the three absolutes are that any business, it doesn't matter what the business is whether it's my business in performance where I noticed it most, whether it's technology, or even my grandfather's business; he was a journeyman plumber. He had a plumbing business. His business relied on expertise in these three things just as surely as my business as an actor does, or my business as a technologist does. Those three things are: the art, the commerce, and the science of your business.

What I mean by that, with regard to the art, it is the skill of actually performing in the function of your job. If you're a plumber, you need to know how to thread pipe and fix toilets and run drains, all that sort of thing. You need to understand the art of your work. In my case as an actor, I need to know how to perform on camera, I need to know how to perform on mic, I need to know how to audition. I need to know a lot of things that are the most visible: the "art" side of things. That's where a lot of people stop is at the art. That's the big mistake that they make because the other two are equally, if not more important.



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The commerce is the business of the business. In the case of me as an actor, I have to understand what all the moving parts are, I have to understand who green lights projects, who really makes the decisions on who gets cast, how to create a relationship so you find your clients and fill their needs... my clients being casting directors, writers, and producers on television, and directors and producers in film. Just as surely as my grandfather's clients: the gas stations, the homeowners, the commercial buildings that he used to work in, were people that he needed to acquire and figure out what he could do to fulfill their needs. My job is just the same in the business side of things. I need to figure out what I can do to fill their needs just like anybody else.

Finally, and this is a real big bugaboo, is the technology or the science of the business. With the rise of the internet over the last few decades, this is like breathing air. It's like drinking water. Being a technologist is something that we all have to do, to a certain degree. The more expertise we have in the technology, the tools, the strategies and the tactics digitally that we need to get our job done. In my case, I need to know how to work with PDF files so I can see my scripts. I need to know how to work with my app Rehearsal so I can learn my lines. I need to know how to create self-taped or self-recorded auditions in my studio here in my house and get them into mp4 format so they're easily moving around on the internet and so I can get them where they need to go. I need to understand the technology.



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I've watched actors, in particular ... This is what caused me to codify this ... I watched actors really struggle with not the art side of it, because it's kind of hard to end up in LA and not have some form of training in the art of being an actor. But the business and the science, no. There's no college that's teaching what you need to know because it's constantly changing. Everything about the business is changing. Actors who shun that are at a very big disadvantage. I was on a commercial shoot with an older woman who said to me, "I just don't understand why they don't messenger over the scripts anymore. I don't know why they don't send a car." And I said, "Well you got booked on this. How did this happen?" "Well my nephew came in and checked my email and he said, "Hey auntie, you've got an audition tomorrow."" And I'm like, "How often does he come in and check your email for you?" "Well I don't like email at all so I have him come in two or three times per week."

Inside, I was crying for this woman. She's decided that the business has changed, but she's not going to change with it. She's decided the technology's changed, she's not going to change with it. Luckily she got this job and I wonder how many jobs she could've gotten if she was better at the business and the technology. I've actors who have said to me, "Look, I love being an actor. But I'm not going to be a good business man and I'm not going to worry about the technology. Because if I do, that's going to take my eye off the ball, that's going to make me a worse actor." That couldn't be further from the truth. I can talk about that if you want. I think that the art is the barrier to entry. The other stuff is what makes you fantastic.



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Danny

I feel like I could go in 30 different directions right now. But I want to start by just creating some context for everything that's going to come next. Because as much as you say you're an actor, technologist, voice-over coach and so fourth, you're also a business person. You're a very skilled and talented business person and applying this lens, which we happen to be using acting as an example and this is where you codified the whole idea, but it applies to most, if not all, business pursuits. Whether you are in business as an entrepreneur selling a product or a service and seeing yourself as such, or whether you have a skill that you would like marketed in the job market or you're selling your services as a freelancer, the business aspect is always there. The art, the science, the commerce are always going to be present. Is that right?

David

Yeah. Even you're working for an employer, I can't think of a job that doesn't require all three of those things to be successful. We talk about the fact that Tom Peters used to refer, back in the 80s, to we have customers both internal and external. We think of customers as the people ... We find them, we figure out what their needs are, we fill them. That's how we're successful. But we also have internal customers. So if you're a secretary and you're serving the CEO of a company, you still have that same pressure applied to you to understand the art of what you do, the business practices that you need to understand, and the technology that you need to execute. I absolutely think that this applies to all areas of work. I thought about a janitor, I thought about a Prime Minister, I thought about all ... Everybody needs to have expertise in all three of these areas simultaneously. The more expertise you have, the more expert you are at it, the more likely it is that you will succeed in that space.



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Danny

Let's talk about acting because acting is your field of expertise, obviously, but also it is a good stand-in for a lot of the arts. I deal with a lot of writers, for example, fiction writers who would say much of the same thing. "I don't want to mess with the technology. I don't want to focus on the business side of things. I just want to write." Fine artists will often come with the same perspective. A lot of people who see their craft as an art, not only do they not want to mess with the science and commerce, often they feel like it corrupts the art to do so.

David

Absolutely. That's exactly the reaction that I get. I would only point you, as a writer, to James Patterson. I would point you, as an artist, to help me with his name Kurt... that drew the broadly-drawn stick figures in the 80s.

Danny

I'm so the wrong person to ask.

David

There's a number of artists. In fact, I went to a conference when they talked about those paintings that are nothing but dots on white canvas, pastel colored dots on white canvas. Both James Patterson and that artist, whoever that artist is, has a little industry going. James Patterson is not writing his books anymore. He may write when he wants to, but he's not writing his books anymore. Tom Clancy didn't write his books towards the end of his career unless he wanted to. Yet, they were putting out book after book after book,



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dozens a year, because he had people working for him who were ghostwriting under his name. Same thing with this artist who's creating artwork that sells for hundreds of thousands of dollars and he's not even the guy putting the dots on the canvas.

There are people that would look at that as being completely sold out. I would submit to you that if you had the opportunity to trade for that kind of freedom and that kind of wealth and were able to do so ... I tell actors all the time, "Who do you want to be? Do you want to trade places with Tom Hanks?" He's got all three of these lined up. He's got a production company, he understands technology, he uses my app, he's all over the web, he's Tweeting all over the place, and he's doing so effectively, he's serving his customer base. Plus, he's an awesome actor. So you have all of these excellent examples that people sometimes take the easy way out and go, "Yeah, no no, I'm not touching the filthy lucre. I'm not letting myself be sullied by a computer. I am an artist." I sit there and I'm looking at them like, "How's that working out for you? You happy? Are you paying your mortgage? How's it going?" If it's not going well, I would submit, that one or more of these areas needs help.

Danny

How do you know which one it is?

David

I think taking an inventory of what you're afraid of, what you're good at, what you're not good at, what you're proud of, what your experience has been and your accomplishments have been very quickly shows you what area you're not doing all that great at. As an



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actor, if I was sitting here going, "I don't know who casts that show." Well, you know what, you can find it out from 90 different locations on the web. You can also follow them and you can do all kinds of things to make sure that's never an issue. "Yeah I don't know how to put myself on tape." Oh my God, go on YouTube and do that in the search box: self-taping auditions. You'll have 90 people who will show you how to set up the camera, set up the lights, and what to do. Casting directors will tell you what they want in a self-taped audition.

The information is there and the fact that you don't know is a good indication that you don't have the skillset to be able to find out the things that you don't know, which is a business skill, not an art skill. You may be able to know how to take a stage, you may be able to know how to do stand up, you may be really good at commercials. You may be "that guy" in commercials. But if you don't know how to collect your money, watch your checks, market yourself, be prepared for auditions, and understand the technology being used, you're in deep trouble. That is pretty easy to suss out by just taking an inventory of what you've been able to accomplish and what you're good and not good at.

Danny

Let's talk about how to apply that practically. I'm hearing this and on the one side, I agree with you completely. But on the other hand ... I'm going to channel some of our listeners who are aspiring artists. People who enjoy and respect and appreciate their art and want to be doing more of it and ideally want to be getting paid for it. They're sitting there thinking ... Let's say they're actors, but they could be writers, they could be artists, they could be whatever. They're thinking, "You know what? I don't even know if I'm a good



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enough actor and I have to work on that. Now you're telling me I've got to know the technology and I've got to know the business. There aren't enough hours in the day. How can I possibly get good enough at all of these things?"

David

I don't believe that there's not enough hours in the day. I believe that, certainly my experience as an actor that was learning, training, networking, and interning ... Again, I didn't think that it was all that frenetic. You give yourself office hours, and you budget those office hours to increase your skills in the areas that you have challenges in. To execute those skills, to move yourself forward, I think some of it is organization. Some of it is being able to identify what isn't working and being able to identify what is. Then fixing the stuff that isn't working by gaining new knowledge.

In the case of acting, everybody in Hollywood, everybody in New York, has their hand out if they're a teacher saying, "I can help you! Just give me some money!" I'm guilty as charged. I will help you learn how to be a great, successful, satisfied and profitable voice-over actor if you take my vo2gogo.com courses. They're a lot cheaper and a lot more intense than many of them are because I'm a working actor, not just somebody who used to do commercials in the 60s or had a little studio and I decided I'm a teacher. I really am harsh with myself about how I'm doing things. Every time I teach a class, I go over it to make sure it hasn't changed, that things haven't updated. Because they always do. I think



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that if you set yourself up with the right training and if you set yourself up with the right attitude, you can change all that.

You actually said something very interesting. You said, "People would like to do their art. Ideally, they'd like to get paid for it." I'd really like to zero in on what that means. Do you really want to get paid for it? Do you really want to pay your rent and be able to afford whatever food you want, whatever lifestyle you want, by using your skills as an artist? Do you really want to do that? Or are you afraid that if you leave the cocoon, the safe cocoon of unpaid work, black box theater, student films, and little indie projects, little web series projects that you get paid \$100, but that \$100 is deferred until they make money; that's all very safe because nobody's really asking you to stick your neck out and go, "I can do this." But if you want to audition for network television and you want to get booked on network television, and if you want to be seen and paid for being seen on network television, you have to have the mindset of, I'm going to do what it takes for as long as it takes to make sure that I have the skills necessary to be successful. It really is a decision that takes you from one side of the river to the other.

The safe side of the river, the .edu email address or being in a fine arts program somewhere or just simply being a student at an acting school, not really moving to, "Okay. Now I'm going to put myself out there. Now I'm going to test and see if I'm able to do this." That's really where a lot of people hang out, claim that they're professional actors. Because, frankly, you don't have to have a license or any sort of certification or testing... typical educational testing to say, "I'm an actor," like you do if you say, "I'm a



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doctor." 60 thousand people land here every month and they stand at the corner of Hollywood and Vine, and they make the announcement: "I am a professional actor." Of course people walking by are like, "Yeah, me too. You got an agent? You booked on anything yet?" It's a crazy world to live in, but it's one of those worlds that if you don't take the knowledge that you have, the skills that you have, hone them, and then use them, you will forever be that "professional actor" who has no credits.

Danny

Is it fair to say that there's a mystique, again, this applies to acting and all the different artistic pursuits, there's a mystique that you can do it as a hobby, do it on the side, but at some point you're going to get discovered. The right person's going to read your book, or see your audition, or whatever

David

Oh no. No no no no no. That didn't even happen to Lana Turner. It's a myth that she was discovered at Schwab's. This idea of, "If I'm just really good at my art, somebody somewhere will notice me." You know who's going to notice you? The person that you tell about yourself. The person you make sure knows about you. That's who's going to "discover" you.



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Danny

Here's a very different kind of objection. There's a good amount of research in the world of "how do you achieve" that argues very compellingly that we are very likely to be much more successful if we're building on our strengths than trying to compensate for our weaknesses.

David

Oh yeah. My girlfriend Betsy is a strengths finder coach and that's one of the things that they say is, "Don't round yourself out but build on those things that you're good at." These are not mutually exclusive. The idea that art, commerce, and science need to be something that you hone, those are not necessarily the same horizontal or vertical categories that things like woo, ideation, maximization, strategies, tactition, learner, and teacher. Those are like a different taxonomy of how we divide and survey our abilities. The goals and the skills, it's like me saying, "My strength is in woo, so I'm not a really good driver." Well, the two have nothing to do with each other, unless a cop pulls you over and woo will come into play.

The idea that building on your strengths is appropriate, as opposed to trying to make yourself as good at all things as you can possibly be. I love that. It's absolutely what I decided to do. I've given up doing some things that I don't think I'm necessarily very good at. But none of those things are things that I have to do. They're all things that I preferred or wanted to do. I'm an okay writer, I actually feel like I'm a pretty good writer. But I hate the process. I hate the idea of spending time writing and rewriting, and rewriting, and rewriting, and rewriting. It just drives me crazy. So I'm not necessarily the best writer on



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the block because I stop before I've perfected something or finished something. I never let perfection get in the way of publishing an article on my blog. I want the information out there, and if it's okay, it's okay. But I understand that if you're going to be a great writer, you have to really write and then rewrite, and rewrite, and rewrite. So I don't think the two are mutually exclusive in terms of art, commerce, and science being those things that you have to be expert in. It's a requirement. It's not something I think you have a choice at if you want to be successful.

Danny

What about the perspective of the aunt whose nephew comes to check her email a few times a week because she's seventy years old and she doesn't know which key is the "any key"? It would seem, from her perspective and maybe from the perspective of a lot of other people, that the gaps you would have to cross to get even to a place of reasonable competence, would be so far as to almost be insurmountable.

David

There's two answers to that. Number one, she's made that choice and she's created a rule set for herself to live her life that makes her comfortable with that choice. The other side of the coin is that I have, one, two, three, four that I can think of right off the top of my head plus 80 octogenarians who are using not just Audacity, a USB microphone, editing, and mastering to Audible's standards every day, but also doing audio books and auditions for voiceover, and putting themselves on tape. One of whom was a recurring on Scrubs, she constantly says, "I'll never get booked after this project because I'll probably die." But then, boom, she gets booked on something else because she understands how the business works and she's taken a little bit of time ... Do I want her debugging something



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on my computer? No. But that doesn't mean that she can't learn what she needs to know to get the job done in today's business climate; today's artistic, commercial, and scientific business climate.

I think that some people, again, sort of write fairy tales for themselves about how hard it is. I don't necessarily think it's that hard. I'm a smart guy, but I'm not the smartest on the planet. Take it at a little bit at a time, get better, do more of what works, less of what doesn't. Within a few months, a year, you can be a lot further along and a lot better off than you would've been had you not tried to hone those skills. It's not this insurmountable mountain. It's a series of little hills and speed bumps that you want to get over to get to where you're going.

Voiceover: That was David H. Laurence XVII with a strong message to artists and entrepreneurs. The art of what you do, whether painting or plumbing, isn't enough to make you successful. You also need the commerce and the science to back it up. You don't have to be a master of money or technology, but you can't shove it off to the side if you hope to be truly successful. One final thought: the world never stops changing and growing, especially where technology is concerned. Neither should you.

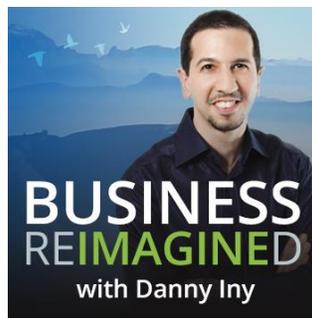


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This has been Business Reimagined with Danny Iny. Join us next time as we talk with Pat Flynn.

Pat

Even when the book was selling and I was making more money than I'd ever made in my whole life at that point, there were still moments when I doubted myself. There'd be stretches of half a day where I wouldn't get a sale and I'd think, "That was it. That was the last one that happened a few hours ago. I won't see another one." I would just constantly battle myself and that resistance and that feeling that I wasn't good enough... that impostor syndrome. I always worried that people were going to ask for a refund and that things weren't good enough. Maybe I'd miss something. It was hard, because I was just a rookie. But was actually kind of cool, too because I just put myself in there and figured things out along the way.

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