



## **Transcript of “Robert McKee: Master the Art of Storytelling - #232”**

Bulletproof Radio podcast #232

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Dave: Hey everyone, it's Dave Asprey with Bulletproof Radio. Today's cool fact of the day is that when a story is told, both the storyteller and the listener's brains are active in the same areas. It's called neuro-coupling and what it means is that your two brains are in sync with each other so that when you're telling a story, you're actually putting thoughts, ideas, and emotions into your listeners' brains. This is why storytelling is an important part of getting whatever it is you'd like done. When you can tell a story, you can get the idea across in a way that you might not with just words.

Today's episode is going to be obviously about telling stories if I didn't sort of give you a hint with that cool fact of the day, but before we get into it, there's a couple of things that I want to share with you. Number one, I'm wearing my cool, new Irlen filters. If you've heard the episode with Heather Irlen talking about how different light affects your brain, these are some new shades, an update to my orange ones, because my brain has actually changed. It's getting healthier and this is a color that actually looks a little bit cooler than orange anyway. I'll wear these sometimes. Right now I'm just experimenting with them. Moldy has now been seen by sixty thousand people so if you haven't seen Moldy movie, go over to [moldymovie.com](http://moldymovie.com), check it out, and while you're at it, check out [Bulletproofconference.com](http://Bulletproofconference.com), because it is now discounted for you to get there for the October conference. It's going to be amazing.

Today's guest is someone who was introduced to us through the Bulletproof forums, and that's a great place for you to go and suggest guests for the show. It's Robert McKee. Robert's a Fulbright Scholar and one of the most sought after screenwriting lecturers around the globe. He runs the McKee Story Seminars and for twenty-five years, he's been the guy you go to when you want to learn about writing and storytelling. He's taught more than a hundred thousand screenwriters, novelists, and playwrights, including a few guys you might have heard of like Peter Jackson, Russell Brand, Jimmy Fallon, Julia Roberts, Kirk Douglas, David Bowie, and a whole bunch more. Basically famous guy whose been performing at the very top of his game for many, many years.

Welcome to the show Robert.

Robert: Thank you, Dave.

Dave: t's an honor to have you here.

Robert: My pleasure.

Dave: You created a seminar called Storynomics which is probably the most renowned. You talk about how people use story in that. Can you give our listeners an understanding of why you focus so heavily on story in that seminar particularly?

Robert: Well, it's a seminar as the title suggests for business. Storynomics means the connect between story and money. What happened essentially is that over the years, a number of people who have no ambitions to write fiction or make documentaries or anything like that, simply business people were coming to my lectures to try to learn of the elements of story and how to compose a story as techniques for both marketing, talking outward into the world, and inward in leadership, strategizing, team-building, and so forth. So I was caught up in this and I talked to these people. I realized that there's a real need in the business community for some clear thinking on the nature of story and the use of story in both directions, inward and outward, from the company. So I put together Storynomics as a way to introduce people in business to the nature of story and the effective use of story in all of those directions.

Dave: What has the biggest impact been when you see an organization or an entrepreneur, a CEO or chief marketing officer, who isn't good at storytelling, who comes to one of your seminars and learns the power of story? What shifts would they see in how they communicate?

Robert: Well what shifts is that when they use it and use it well ... Of course, it's not just the matter of using any old story. The story has to be well told and effective. When they master it and learn to tell a story well, the

success of the company escalates. The net result is that they have a greater income, their business expands.

One of my clients is a major construction company called Bolt Construction. They build power plants and hospitals and educational institutions of all kinds. They used to bid in order to get their work. They had to win a bid competitively and they used to bid in the old fashioned way of pitting their numbers against the competitor's numbers in a rhetorical point, point, point, point, point, point, point. Therefore, higher bid. I taught them how to story-fy their bids, how to tell the story from the client's point of view, making the client the core character in the story. Use the same data, the numbers don't change, but the vehicle for conveying those numbers and the process of the bid to the dynamics of the bid to the client changed greatly. As a result, they went from winning one bid out of ten to winning one bid out of two.

Dave: Wow.

Robert: They doubled their gross. They jumped twenty places up the hundred top construction companies in America by simply learning how to take data and story-fy it. As you were saying in your introduction, the people making the bid and the people listening to the bid are in sync. So that's the result is the communication becomes enormously more effective.

Dave: So if you're just getting started in your career, let's say early twenties, just finished school, and you're going in for a job interview, if you can tell a story it sounds like you have a much better chance of getting the job, right?

Robert: You do, but that's a tricky terrain. You have to know what kind of story to tell. In those situations, I would not advise somebody to go into an interview and start telling the interviewer the story of their life.

Dave: Yeah, that's bad.

Robert: They have to learn this in marketing as well. The thing that turns people off more than anything else is bragging.

Dave: Yes.

Robert: Bragging and promising. "I'm the best. I'm this. I'm that." Bragging and "I will do this for your company and I will do that." Bragging and promising really turns people off. The best story to tell, I would think, in the context of an interview is about someone else, maybe a teacher who really inspired you. I think you should avoid your parents, but somebody else other than yourself. Something about stories that would link you to the nature of the company and the kind of work you're being interviewed for but is not on the nose about you. So you get the same thing across, which is your enthusiasm, your knowledge of the job, your preparation for the job, your passion about doing this kind of work. All of that can get across, but in a story that stars the person that's interviewing you, that stars the company that you're going to go work for.

If you told a really effective story demonstrating that you've done your research and you know this company inside and out, you know what they do, and you want to be a part of that enterprise, tell the story about the company about the company that you're trying to be hired by. Any of those ploys would be much more effective than simply telling your life story. Once you get that, putting it in story form rather than a list of facts. When that company was established, how much that company makes, how many clients they have, et cetera. Just reciting a list of facts about a company is not a story. So you'd have to take what you know, your knowledge, convert it to a story starring someone other than yourself that implies who you are and why they should hire you. If you can manage a strategy like that, interviews would go very, very well.

Dave: One of the favorite questions that I like to ask people during an interview is tell me about a time when you failed, because I'm actually totally okay with people who fail at things. Usually if you haven't failed, then you're going to be really afraid of it and you won't push your limits

because you're so concerned about it. How would you go about that kind of situation where someone asks you tell kind of a negative story, but one that might have a gold lining? Is there a way to do that in a way that's advantageous?

Robert: Well, off the top of your head, that story, if they didn't see that question coming, that's very dangerous. Very dangerous. The story that you would tell there would have to start with yourself, wouldn't it? The risk is that the people of course would get dishonest about that. They'd make one up and however, they failed and whatever story they told, it wouldn't be their fault. So that's a wonderful question. The only advice I could give to someone on the receiving end of that question is tell the truth and the climax of the story would have to be a positive one even though it's about failure. The climax would be what I learned by failure.

Dave: Yes.

Robert: It takes an exceptional person to improvise that story if they didn't know the question was coming.

Dave: I think that's because I like to hire exceptional people, shout out to all the Bulletproof team. It's a tough one because if you're afraid of failure, oftentimes that fear can interrupt your ability to tell a good story. It may trip you up and make you a little bit more honest, but I guess I gave away my secret. Now everyone who hears this will know I might ask that during an interview. That's okay too.

Robert: People in business generally are risk-averse.

Dave: Yeah.

Robert: One of the difficulties they have in using story to communicate is that story has to have a negative component. If it's going to have a positive ending, it has to at some point hit a negative base. There has to be a problem and its solution, but you have to be able to dramatize that problem. Dramatize the need or whatever, or what's gone wrong to

need a solution. So that is often difficult for people in business because they just don't want to be associated with anything negative. One of the problems I have working - I can get them past this - with a client, I've got to get them over their what I call nega-phobia, which is rampant everywhere in business. The fear of all things negative.

I was told about a book. I haven't read it, but a book on business in which the writer advised people that when they're in meetings, they should never use the word "but". "But" is too negative. "We tried to do this, but it didn't work. We went in this direction, but we should have gone in another direction." Whatever. The word "but" he claimed was too negative so therefore, he recommended using the word "however".

Dave: Oh come on. It's the same word, but more highfalutin.

Robert: Of course it is, but "however" he felt was easier is on the ears and less somehow negative. I mean that is how hypersensitive people in business are to anything negative, anything that suggest failure, anything that suggests a risk. If they can't get over that, if they can't bring themselves to grapple with reality, and half of reality is negative, their stories have to energy. Their stories just become some bragging and promises or some kind of emotional manipulation using pretty pictures to seduce or if it's a political campaign using negative pictures to damn the opponent, but some kind of an emotional manipulation. Getting people in business to really embrace the power of story, one of the great tasks I have is to get them to deal with reality and recognize that every well-told story is going to have some negative dimension to it in order that the positive ending of the story have impact. If it's positive, positive, positive, positive, positive, positive, it's meaningless.

Dave: It lacks credibility, right? You can't have light without darkness.

Robert: Exactly. We know that. People in business know that it isn't all sunshine and strawberries and so they don't believe it. When they hear somebody reciting positive, positive, positive, positive, positive, they sit there skeptical, cynical, not buying it. As I said to get business people over that



threshold, I have to show them many great examples of course of storytelling that has that negative dimension. That is why that's such power.

Dave: What is the single best example of storytelling that you know of?

Robert: Oh, I don't know. Everyday somebody somewhere comes up with a whole new wonderful marketing campaign or speech or leadership tactic that knocks me out. Right now, I happen to be in love with the Adobe Company.

Dave: Okay.

Robert: Adobe is putting out, and I don't know the ad agency they hired to do this, but it could have been done in-house, I just don't know, but Adobe, their market is marketers. Adobe has marketing software, marketing servicing, so they've got to sell this to marketers. If I could create a special place in hell that would be it; that your job is to market the marketers. They've got a series that they've put out that star marketers that is so effective. The storytelling is just brilliant. What they've done is they've really sat down and asked themselves what it is to be a marketer. Day in, day out, the CMO has got people coming in pitching this software, this system, this, this, this, or that and making promises. I've seen a marketing campaign done for Coca-Cola that promised it would double Coke's sales. Of all the absurdities, but nonetheless.

Dave: Wow.

Robert: Promises like that. So when marketers are sitting there fielding these pitches from these companies like Adobe, the first problem they have of course is bullshit. Most of what they're hearing is bullshit.

Dave: Yeah.

Robert: The second problem is when they use this technology, the data is erroneous. They get a lot of false data. They're promising data that will

really let them make decisions based in reality, but the data itself is flawed. So Adobe's got these wonderful pieces out where they show marketers dealing with fielding the bullshit from software salesman, dealing with false and inaccurate data, and these stories just knocked me out. They're done with wit. They're done with a certain wonderful kind of cynicism. Yet you just know that they're terrifically effective. Adobe's doing very, very well against its competition. So Adobe understands marketers and tells stories that star marketers and as a result, the people that they're pitching to are moved to adopt Adobe's technology.

Dave: Let's say that you're not running Adobe's marketing, but say you're in the parent-teacher association, the PTA.

Robert: Yeah.

Dave: How can you take these storytelling skills and just use them in daily life to be more effective rather than in the boardroom level. I think a lot of people listening don't know how to bring those skills to use on a daily basis. How would you advise people to do that?

Robert: To tell an effective business story ... This is not fiction.

Dave: Yeah, true stories, right.

Robert: These are business stories. They are what I call the purpose told story. The purpose told story is not entertaining. I mean if it's well told it will be entertaining like those Adobe pieces I mentioned, but it's not entertainment. It's told to hook attention, hold attention, and then pay off that attention with a story climax that moves the listener to action. The purpose it to get people to do what you need them to do, to take action, to buy a product, to agree with a policy, execute the policy, whatever it is.

If I was on a school board and I need votes on that board to take an action on what I think will be effective for the school, the first step is to

identify the audience. Stories are actually written backwards not forwards. You start with the ending in the purpose told story in business especially. Who am I talking to? Identify that audience very specifically. Then the next question is where does it hurt for that person? What does that person need? What does that person want? What is their problem? Where does it hurt? What are they suffering from? Identify their need, where it hurts. Then you have to ask yourself, "What do I want this person to do?" To vote my way? Or whatever. When you understand who you're talking to and what their problem is in life that your story is going to solve, and after they've heard your story, how you want them to act, getting all of that together is the first step.

Then you go back. In that case of course you would mandate the person you're talking to, the core character of the story. You would tell a story about them. A story that says, "I'm on your side. I know where you hurt. I've been there. I've seen it. I get it. Here's how you, by voting this way, can take a step towards solving your problem and making what hurts go away." So that's the simple process. It's simple to talk about, but it's not easy to do. It starts with the ending. Who am I talking to? Where does it hurt? What do I want them to do? Then you go back and compose a story designed to dramatize your understanding of their problem and starring them, not you, them.

This is one of the most important steps for any business to take is to understand that today they must become consumer-centered. The stories that they tell have to be about the consumer and they have to star the consumer and dramatize their awareness of the consumer's needs in life and that your company is on the consumer's side. So if I were on the board of a school and I'm talking to parents, that's a different audience. That's a different kind of hurt and a different kind of need. So I would tell the story about the parents and their struggle to get an appropriate education for their children, like that. You start with the ending.

Dave: Start with the ending, all right. I've found that the ability to communicate really complex ideas in a story helped enormously. For a while, I ran the web and Internet engineering program for the University of California. There I'm trying to tell a story about this packet that needs to go from one end of the Internet to the other and it traverses all these different terrains. It was such a complex thing, the only thing I could figure out to convey this over five years of testing it was to sort of tell a story about do you personalize this little bit of information and all the places it goes. I wish that I had known that early in my teaching career, because the facts didn't work, even with engineers, but the picture, the story they went along with it. That helped to form even the way that we're talking today, just kind of beating myself against the wall of really complex ideas. That was a painful lesson for me.

When you're talking with some of your clients, like Microsoft, these really big companies, how do you short circuit that long learning process to make someone good at telling a story, or at least passable, so they can get these ideas across?

Robert: I workshop them.

Dave: The workshops that you do, how long are they?

Robert: Depends. At least a day or two. Depends on how many people they want me to work face-to-face with. The workshop consists of the executive comes in with what they think is a story. I don't give them any lecture. Perhaps they've come to my Storynomics before, but they get up and they pitch. They tell their story. Then I take it apart. I show them what worked, what didn't, and how they could fix it. Then they go off for whatever time and rewrite or rework that story and they come back and do it a second time to see if they can take this direction and rework the story in an effective way. Then we take notes again. We had an audience of other executives and people in the company who are working them on these problems as well and they give notes, but it's primarily my

notes. So they do it at least twice. Then if it's the second day, they come back again, third time. They see the progress.

I can explain to people what a story is. I can show them multitudes of examples in various contexts of people using story not just to market, but in leadership. That takes them to a certain point of understanding, but still they need to practice. They need to do it, to take notes, and to be shown, because I'm a good storyteller. I can take almost anybody's story that they've pitched to the company and/or to the hypothetical clients and I can rework that story on the spot. The moment I do, they immediately see oh yeah that would be better, that would be better, because they're making all the amateur mistakes. They learn from that. Workshops are that bridge that takes them from understanding from the lecture, getting it through examples, and them doing it themselves with critiques. That's how I teach. It's simple.

It's the way they used to teach in college. They'd have a lecture and a recitation. Then in recitation, recitation leaders, a grad student probable, face-to-face how this thing works or how to do that kind of math or whatever the problem would be. It's the same process. You give them learning, you give them examples, and then you give them practice.

Dave: In 2002, I was getting my MBA and I tried to convince my classmates that we should do a project on what is now called neuromarketing. I wanted to hook electrodes up to my classmates heads, measure their brain waves while we basically told them stories or while their looked at advertisements which a form of visual storytelling, just to see what their brains would do so we could kind of figure this out. This has now become much more of a science than it was a decade ago. Maybe two, three years ago, I sat next to the CMO of Monsanto at a neuromarketing conference at Stanford. That kind of scared me a little bit. Is storytelling a form of manipulation? Is it fair for a company to be able to tell a really effective story? Are they taking advantage of their customers or their audience when they do that?

Robert: You could lie either way.

Dave: Okay. Very fair point.

Robert: Have a choice. You could put PowerPoint presentation up there and slant all the data in your favor, which is what we do when we make a PowerPoint presentation.

Dave: Yeah, that's what PowerPoint's for, right?

Robert: At the end of the day, you are persuading. So you put up your data, your authorities, your pie charts, whatnot. You put up your point, point, point, point, point, therefore, right? You deliberately distort it. You ignore or avoid everything that would contradict what you're saying. That's one kind of persuasion. The wonderful thing about story is that in order to use story to persuade, get the light to go on and people go, "Oh, yeah. I get it," you have to show the negative side. In rhetoric, you do not show anything that contradicts yourself, but in story you're talking about reality, the dynamic of change, how things move from positive to negative. You have to embrace both sides to tell a story, but it can be bullshit too. Stories can distort. The interesting thing is most people know when they're being bullshitted. So if use story to bullshit, it won't work, because people have a kind of antenna for the truth and they know when it's distorted or a lie.

Like I said, you can lie in rhetoric. You can lie in story. It's more difficult to lie in story, but I can't say you can't. In terms of fairness, no. There's nothing unfair about an honest communication saying, "Look, here's the situation. This is where this company has been. This is where the company is now. Here's our strategy in story-form for the future. If we follow this strategy we will have success. If we go in that direction or that direction, we will fail." That is honest. That is as real as it is possible to get. Your projection for the future may not pan out, but you have a plan that is based in data. It is based in reality and it's as truthful as anything ever gets in life. So it's not a question of ethics. To lie is to lie.

Ethically, it's immoral to do that, but whichever way you do it, either rhetoric or story, it's a lie.

There's nothing wrong with rhetoric by the way. If you can really make an excellent PowerPoint presentation that has solid fact that people don't argue with and convince people that this is the logic of it and therefore, right? Why not? I'm not a fanatic for story. What I'm a fanatic for is excellent communication in business and whatever communicates the truth is effective business technique. Whatever communicates lies is just going to come back and bite you in the ass.

Dave: So that-

Robert: So if you're honest and you're trying to persuade people to see things for what they really are, there's no question of ethics.

Dave: So the built-in integrity detector that we all have.

Robert: Sure.

Dave: Is part of that?

Robert: Sure. It's survival. If people in business lied to one another, deceived one another, the company is doomed.

Dave: Yes.

Robert: If they lie to their clients or their customers, the market will destroy them.

Dave: Yep.

Robert: Today more than ever. Today people communicate faster and wider than ever before and things go viral. Success goes viral and lies go viral. They will rate you one to five. I've said that storytelling, the ability to take data, story-fy it, and tell a story from the either the consumer's

point of view or what you were talking about Dave from those years that you were working, you had a product-centered story. Your problem was to get empathy for that product.

Dave: Right.

Robert: Right? So you had to personify that product in such a way that people understood the story's not directly about them, but by implication it's about them and they identified, you're trying to get them to identify with the product itself. The third possibility of course is what we call branding. There you're trying to get the world to take a positive attitude toward a brand and try to get empathy for a brand, getting empathy for a corporation. Again, I can't think of harder work than that, given the attitude. I read the other day that if ninety-five percent of all brands disappeared tomorrow, ninety-five percent of all people would not care. So getting the public to take an attitude toward branders ... There's a metric company called Havas that does what they call the meaningful brand index. The measurement is based upon the public's attitude, "This brand enhances my life. This brand improves my life." Guess what is number one at the top of the meaningful brand index?

Dave: Apple.

Robert: Nope.

Dave: Google.

Robert: It's up there, it's number three.

Dave: Okay, another bad guess, but I'm not sure what would be number one.

Robert: Google.

Dave: Ah, Google. That was my second choice. All right.



Robert: Yeah, that's number one. "This brand improves my life." You know what was number two, between Google and Apple? Samsung.

Dave: Wow, okay.

Robert: Because this is an international right?

Dave: Follow the numbers.

Robert: Outside the United States, Samsung has as much or more presence in the world as Apple does. The attitude is, "This brand improves my life." Therefore, people identify with the brand and the feeling that, "This brand is on my side. This brand understands me. This brand is working to improve my life." To do that, you need story. There's no other way. You can't just say, "We're the biggest. We're the best. We're the whatever," and expect people to identify. If companies don't get this, they're in real trouble, because the Millennial generation, people under the age of thirty-five or so today, they see bragging and promising coming a mile away and they laugh at it. They see enough emotional manipulation coming and they have at it. They know when people are trying to use them. They know when people are bullshitting. They find bragging and promising ill mannered.

Dave: Yeah.

Robert: Ill-mannered. So if a company today wants to get that Millennial market and hold it for the decades in the future as these people grow older, they have to stop this ... The essence of advertising for over a hundred years has been bragging and promise, bragging and promise. That just does not work anymore, but advertising agencies and PR firms continue to brag, continue to promise, and then wonder why the brand's awareness is declining, wonder why sales are increasing. Old people like me, we're so used to bragging and promising, we don't sneer much, but young people do. They don't want to be interrupted. What they want is to be entertained and a story. Business stories are very brief. They usually only have one turning point, maybe two. They're very brief and the most

precious asset that a company can have is the ability to get attention and hold attention for whatever time it takes. Thirty seconds, three minutes, whatever. To hook and hold attention and move people to action.

First, you've got to get their attention. In order to get attention, you tell a story that has a hooky opening. A turning point that hooks interest. Someone goes, "Really? Really? What happens next?" Bragging doesn't get that kind of attention.

Dave: If you were to market to an older audience, you might stand up and say something very much like, "Look at all the success. I've done really, really well," et cetera, whatever. If you were to take that and translate it to a story that would work for younger audiences, but you want to convey that same idea, how do you flip it? What do you do to basically-?

Robert: How do you turn bragging into a story?

Dave: Assuming that the bragging is there.

Robert: I've done really well. I'm really, really good at what I do.

Dave: I'll put it out there: I lost a hundred pounds. I'm not bragging about it. I still have stretch marks. I was a beast for much of my life. The only reason I bring this up is that when I'm talking with people that are trying out the stuff that I do, the stuff that I wrote about in my New York Times Bestselling book is it's illustrative of the point, but honestly it's not, "Hey look at me." There's ten thousand guys that are more ripped with better abs than me. It's like, "Look, this is an example of what you can do." How do you do that? I don't really brag about this, but there are people like, "Oh Dave, likes to talk about himself." No, I like to talk about how you can lose a ton of weight and I just happen...

Robert: Why don't you just talk about how you can lose a ton of weight? Just shift your pronouns.

Dave: Okay, cool.

- Robert: It's not hard. It's just getting rid of the words "I", "me", "mine", "my".
- Dave: Amen.
- Robert: Change it to "you".
- Dave: Yes.
- Robert: Right? "You" is both plural and singular. Just shift the pronoun around. One way to get it back to your success is to tell a story that stars you or whoever you're talking about. Then you say, "There's a way out. This is the technique. This is the change that you have to make in your lifestyle. I suffered this. When I made that change, you know?" Being able to validate that you have done through what they're going through or will go through is important, but as soon as possible, get it back to them.
- Dave: That makes sense. I just want to be the guinea pig there to say, "It's possible." The work that I do is certainly about making change in other people. I'm pretty happy where I am now. I don't need to talk about myself.
- Robert: It helps. When you mentioned your book just now, I'm sure out of habit, you said it was a New York Times Bestseller. That's bragging.
- Dave: Thanks for that. I'm always torn now because-
- Robert: New York Times Bestseller. It just comes out, right?
- Dave: Thanks for that feedback.
- Robert: It's great. It depends on how face-to-face you are with the person you're talking to. If you're literally face-to-face, you could see it in their eyes when there's doubt. Therefore, you can move the story that you're telling to satisfy that doubt by saying, "You know, I wrote a book on this. X thousands of people and I get letters and emails telling me thanks. It

will work." Let them assume it was a bestseller given the numbers. If you're telling the story as you do, a broadcast, then you can't see their faces and you have to sense when their doubt might arise and find a way to move the story towards something that would satisfy that doubt. You've done this long enough, you know how to have that sixth sense that tells you this is a point where I think I need to use a little rhetoric, introduce the facts, and bolster this moment. How much or how little of that, who can say? It really depends on so many factors that vary from story to story.

The beautiful thing about story is that it allows you, if you come to a turning point, you've got their curiosity, it allows you then to dump exposition in, to pour in the facts, because they're hooked. They want to know how is this going to turn out. At that point then comes the data. The story incorporates data wonderfully. You've got facts to back up, but you want to put them in a context at a moment that they're really hooked and they really want to know. What you were saying at the very beginning of your introduction, that there's a neurology to this, there's a neuroscience behind this, and when you tell story really well, there comes a moment in the listener, in the audience where their mind is absolutely open and receptive. At that point, you put in the brain. At that point, you put in the last step, the one you want them to take, to look into the service or the product. You can't get that in the rhetoric. Rhetoric is arm-twisting of a certain kind, but story just opens people up and makes them receptive when it's well done. All of this is predicated on skill and a really well-told story.

Dave: One of the things that Bulletproof Radio focuses on is understanding how people get to the top of their game. Peter Jackson called you the guru of gurus. You're one of the top storytellers out there. Where I've probably been deficient in asking questions today because I just actually got a chance to be schooled by a guru, but how did you get to be so good at this? What did you do to be at this level?

Robert: I told the truth. That's the real difference. First of all, I have real knowledge. The lectures that I've given are based on decades and

decades of experience directing the theater. I directed professionally over sixty plays. I acted professionally for sixty plays. Therefore, my job was to unravel what writers had done and then recreate it in a performance or a cast of characters on stage. I followed that with three years of research and a bibliography that was literally three hundred titles long into the art of story, stage, page, or screen. Then I was a writer. I had a good deal of success writing television. I sold twenty screenplay deals in Hollywood. I was a successful writer. So I had knowledge.

I noticed that what other people were doing in trying to teach writing was pretending that it's easy and that there's a formula. Step by step you follow this recipe and voila a wonderful screenplay and you have your name on the screen and make a million dollars. Essentially they were lying to people. They were pretending it was easy and that anybody could do it. What I did, and do, is tell the truth. This is really difficult. You're probably in over your head and if you're going to succeed, you're going to have to dedicate the next ten years of your life, and ten years of failure, and ten screenplays that nobody wants, plays that never see the stage, books that nobody publishes, it's going to take you ten major works of story art to fail again and again and again in order to master this very difficult art form.

I lectured to drive the dilettantes out of the room. I only lectured to dedicated professionals and I don't mean people who make money writing. I mean professional in their attitude. They have high standards. They're not just trying to copy last year's summer hits or whatever. They want to write original, insightful, meaningful, emotional storytelling for stage, page, or screen. I take a tough attitude toward and I make people work really hard in the lecture. They take a hundred, two hundred pages of notes.

The result is my reputation grew. Word of mouth spread around the world that this guy will sit you down and will not bullshit you. You will learn what story is and you will have some insight into content as well as form. I think that's the reason I'm a success. I really do. I've never

been to anybody else's lecture, but I hear whispers about what goes on, and the ass kissing is notorious in these things. I just won't do that. I'm not rude. I try not to be rude, but I don't kiss their ass. I don't hold their hands.

Writing is the loneliest job in the world. You've got to sit in your pit with your characters in your head and there's nobody there to help you. You've got to do it on your own. Seeking support is just another form of procrastination. You have to do it on your own. I don't want people coming to my lecture thinking that I'll be there for them. I'm not going to be there for them. They're going to do it on their own. When people reject their first efforts ... I mean the first thing you write is always the worst thing you'll ever write as any common sense tells you. When it's rejected, you're going to have to pull yourself back up and start the next projects.

Writers aren't people with a story to tell. Writers are people with stories to tell their whole life. So they start the next one, and the next one, and the next one, and the next one. They're going to do it on their own. If they can't deal with the truth in my lecture, they're never going to deal with it on their own at the keyboard.

Anyways, I'm tough and practical and real and I don't bullshit. It's a lot of fun. The lecture is also very funny. I used to do stand-up comedy. I use a lot of shtick in what I do. So as a result, word of mouth spread around the world for the last twenty-five, thirty years that you'll learn from this guy. It is what it is.

I never made any effort to market it. I got in and the phone would ring. People would call. I'd get invitations to come to this part of the world, that part of the world. It just happened purely by word of mouth.

Dave: I can tell you during the course of this interview, you've convinced me that I need to come to one of your lectures. I'll definitely be doing that.

Robert: Yeah, you'll get an invitation Dave. Don't worry.

Dave: Beautiful, I appreciate it. There's a question that every guest on Bulletproof Radio answers at the end of the show. It's based on all the stuff you know, not just about storytelling, but just your entire life's path. If someone came to you and said, "I want to perform better at everything." What are the three most important things that they need to know or the three things that they need to do? Just the most important piece of advice you have for someone. Top three.

Robert: Persistence. It takes practice to perfect something. You can't give up. You have to persist. Some people are capable of persistence and others not. People just generally wait for a crisis and then they get serious. How long they can stick to it, who can say? Persistence, number one.

Number two is a high standard. If you want to do something well, you've got to want to do it as well as the very best people who do this thing do it. You won't necessarily get to that level. That's a rarefied stratus for the most talented and the most whatever, but in the constant pursuit of perfection, you will achieve the best. People who achieve are not willing to settle for good enough.

So they have to have high standards, they have to be persistent, and they have to understand that excellence of any kind, whether it's a sport, whether it's a business thing, whatever, that excellence of any kind is based upon knowledge. They have to do research and they have to know what it is they are trying to do. The more they can understand what they're trying to do, the better they'll be at it. The notion that you can rely on your instincts is really foolishness.

Dave: Robert, thanks for that incredible knowledge. I really appreciate being able to learn from someone at your level. Where can people find out more about Storynomics and about what you do, just your overall body of work?

Robert: They go to our website which is [McKeestory.com](http://McKeestory.com).



Dave: M-C-K-E-E-story.com

Robert: That's it. McKeestory.com and it'll all be there for them.

Dave: Okay. We'll put that link in the show notes so people can come on over and download the transcript and anything else in order to find your work. I really appreciate you taking the time on Bulletproof Radio today because it's an honor to be able to talk to people who've spent their whole career focusing on one skill and helped some of the very top people in the world. I consider it really an amazing opportunity to get a chance to chat with you. I enjoyed myself.

Robert: I enjoyed it too. There were good questions and it was a lot of fun. Thanks a lot.

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