

A portrait of Robb Lanum, a man with short hair and a slight smile, wearing a light blue button-down shirt. He is standing in front of a window with blinds. The background is slightly blurred.

Robb Lanum

BS '91, MA '93 in Radio Television Film. Feature screenplay "Who Wants To Be A Supervillain?!" currently under option. Current day job: Document & Creative Services, Deloitte & Touche LLP. Previously: freelance writer: Rugrats (Nickelodeon); script coordinator at NBC Studios, Dick Clark Productions, Nickelodeon; freelance script reader at Paul Kohner Inc. (talent agency), Fox Original Movies, and DreamWorks SKG. Blog: www.robblanum.wordpress.com

ARUNI GUNASEGARAM

To me, success boils down to setting high standards for yourself and then meeting them while enjoying the process. Most people start out focused on their careers or on achieving some kind of notoriety in their field — and it's kind of a narrow focus. And then as life changes around them, they adapt their definition and move on.

There are times that I feel I'm not successful — that I'm not setting the world on fire or haven't done what I set out to do. But as I've gotten older, I've realized that success isn't one-dimensional, and it's the balancing of many aspects of my life that contributes to my feeling successful.

In the world of screenwriting, luck plays a role in success, but it only takes you so far. In this industry, there is a lot of timing involved and a lot of relationship-building, and who knows when these will converge to create an opportunity. But if you're not prepared to act on that opportunity once it comes up, then you haven't served yourself well. Luck might get you in the door or give you a chance, but it won't win the day; it still comes down to practice, work, and study. You might get that lucky break, but as for the next step after that and a continuous career track, luck becomes a smaller and smaller player. It's smarter to keep working on the things you can control rather than waiting to get lucky.

There are some instructors I had at UT who really shaped the way I think. One of the best teachers I had was Darryl Wimberley. We called him the "Script Nazi." He taught the first screenwriting class in the graduate program, and he was a larger-than-life character. He really instilled that there are skills to measure yourself by; it's not just subjective whether someone likes your script or not. He broke it down and illustrated that it's not nebulous. There are steps and ways to get better. This has influenced the way I work. We thought of his

class as our boot camp. He showed us what screenwriting is and how it works. No excuses.

Two other great instructors were Steve Mims and Charles Ramirez-Berg. If Wimberley was the Nazi, Mims was the "Joy." He reinforced that making movies is fun. It's about a team and building interpersonal relationships. He kept things light — he used to say that making movies was the most fun you could have with your clothes on. It's a lot of work, but you enjoy doing it because you get to share something with people. Charles kept us aware of what we were exploring instead of just concentrating on the mechanics of it. What are you getting at? What makes it interesting to you? And as Steve would say, if you're not having fun, what's the point?

So, I got both my work ethic and my love for script writing from UT — and I think both those things are integral to success.

While I have had success in my career, I feel most successful with my family. And that goes back to success being multi-dimensional and entirely related to balance. I have a wonderful wife and two kids, and I went through a period where I worked long hours and didn't see them much. Now I have a day job outside the industry, and I work on my material on the side. I see much more of my family and am happier at the moment with that balance than I would be if I were super successful in the industry.

So, for me, the balance is what's most important. If anyone will remember me, it'll be my kids, and I'd like them to remember that I had as much energy and participation in their lives as I had in my own.

The "Success to Me" series is prepared by Aruni Gunasegaram, BBA '92, MBA '98, an entrepreneur, and Pam Losefsky, an Austin writer and editor.