

Creating What Matters

A Conversation with Robert Fritz, author of *Your Life as Art*

By John Milton Fogg

Robert Fritz (RobertFritz.com) is a true Renaissance man— just 500 years after the fact. He's been an on-stage musician, a composer, painter, filmmaker, screenwriter, author, teacher, trainer, organizational development specialist, business consultant, entrepreneur and absolute master of the art and science of creating.

*In the past 25 years, Robert has trained more than 80,000 people in 27 countries. He is one of the true pioneers of human development and the author of the best-selling classic, *The Path of Least Resistance*. His latest book, *Your Life As Art*, takes his ground-breaking work to new vistas, delving deeper into the spirit of the creative process and what drives people to create. Many are saying it his best book yet.*

Robert has also created (in collaboration with a company called Global Partners) a video-based course for network marketers, called "Creating What Matters." John Fogg, a long-ago former student of Fritz's, recently spoke with Robert about his work— it was the first time the two had spoken in almost 20 years.

What does "Creating What Matters" mean?

There are two notions here. First is the verb, "creating," which means to bring into being, to make something happen. You start without the thing you're creating, and at the end of the process, you now have the thing you're creating.

Creating is the most successful act of accomplishment in human history.

The creative process has given us all the arts, sciences, pop culture, architecture... all the most positive aspects of our civilization are products of the creative process— yet we aren't taught the creative process in school.

Instead, we learn how to have the "right responses" or engage in the "right processes," which generally turn out to entirely independent from what actually matters to us. Which brings us to the second notion in that statement: "what matters."

When we say "Creating What Matters," we mean creating what matters *to you*. But people often don't know what matters to them, or even know how to think about what they want.

People often conceive of what matters to them in terms of what they think *ought* to matter to them, or what other people say *should* matter to them. Often, in listening to others, we are dissuaded away from things we actually want, or misdirected toward things that we happen to have an aptitude for but are not really interested in.

Let's say you're a high school student and your guidance counselor tells you, "You have some talent for math; you ought to go to school and become a mathematician." You take the advice, get a bunch of degrees in math and become a mathematician. Twenty years later, right in the middle of your math career, you suddenly realize you don't particularly *like* mathematics! Yet you've built your whole world around this ability, which you happen to have, but which holds no true, deep interest for you.

It would make much more sense if the educational process started from the perspective of what matters to you.

Of course, this doesn't obviate the necessity or value of being taught a broad range of skills and subject areas. In the beginning of the creative process, there may well be things you really want to bring into being that will take some skill development. You may simply not have the immediate aptitude for some of the things you want to do. Part of the process of accomplishing the outcomes you're after is to learn how to develop those abilities you need but don't naturally have. But the creative process involves both the mechanics of creation and the creator's orientation: Who you are in relationship to the creation.

It's vitally important that people have the experience of being true to themselves, pursuing those things that are

most important to them, that invoke their highest aspirations and deepest values.

It's important to organize your life around those things that matter most to you on an essential level, a level where you can become fully involved in the pursuit of that creation.

Are there some principles we can follow or questions we can ask to begin revealing what it is that really matters to us?

One thing that often gets in the way is that instead of thinking about what they really want, people often think about what they think they need to have in place in order to accomplish certain inner goals or create certain inner experiences.

In other words, they get sidetracked by *the means*, when what they're after is a particular *end result*.

For example, "Once I have this job or career, it'll make me happy." What you really want here is not that job or career, but a certain kind of internal experience, which you're identifying as "happiness."

It helps to separate the internal experience from the external experience.

Robert Frost said, "All of the great things are done for their own sake." That doesn't mean there's no return on investment; there may well be, but it's simply not the point of what you're creating. If the return on investment (that is, the result of doing something) is really what you want, why not name that in the first place? For a lot of people, the inability to achieve what they want goes hand in hand with the fact that they have not truly named it yet.

Another reason we often don't know what we want is that we're looking on too large a level.

So, start small; "baby steps"?

Exactly; pursuing small things you want gives you the opportunity to practice creating.

Pick something small you want— a dinner party, a room looking a particular way, to write a poem, to make a flower arrangement, to prepare a certain kind of meal, to go on a certain trip— make the project small enough so you can do it in a short period of time.

Get into the rhythm of picking out end results you want, things you'll be quite happy with but which have no extracurricular meaning in the larger scheme of your life. Things you create for their own sake.

In so doing, you remove all the emotional charge or burden from this result and simply get into the rhythm of creating.

This makes you more decisive and gives you a chance to gain a sense of what it's like to want something, independent of any other trappings, and to create it successfully. Then you can begin to apply the learning you experience here to some of the larger issues in your life.

Aren't some of those "extracurricular trappings" the very things that prevent people from a really clear and vivid picture of what they want? For example, I might have trouble envisioning what I want because I'm doing what is expected of me, or what I think I should want.

Yes; often people ask the question, "What do I want?" but instead, they're really answering the question, "What *should* I want? What am I *supposed* to want?" And they make choices in life based on the limited menu which they think is being offered to them.

Are there other things we can do to open us up to more possibilities?

One is to create an understanding of what you want on an inner experiential level, independent of your circumstances. People too often draw a connection between outer circumstances and inner circumstances: Once I'm rich, I'll be happy; once I have my relationship, I'll be satisfied and fulfilled.

What if we understood that our inner experiences are not a product of our external experiences?

There are people who are rich who are unhappy; there are people who have relationships who are not satisfied or fulfilled. The converse is also true: there are people who are in modest or even disadvantaged material circumstances, yet who are, in fact, quite happy and satisfied, who have an involvement with life that is quite fulfilling.

If we took these two categories of experience, inner and outer, and created them differently and independently, we would find that we were no longer burdening the external with the internal. In other words, you can choose how you would like your life to feel; you can choose the quality of your life, the experience of health, the experience of involvement, the experience of interest, how you would like your relationships with people to be, and pursue creating that for its own sake.

No matter what your current reality is.

Right. You tell yourself the truth: I want this, and I currently have that.

What I've been teaching people is to create inner goals as well as outer goals, and pursue them for their own sake.

Can you give us some examples of inner goals, Robert?

For myself, there's a type of inner experience I'm after: I want to feel connected and involved with my life. There is a level of depth and profundity about life itself I want to feel, a balance of meaning, purpose and space. I recently described this by saying I want my inner life to feel like Aaron Copland's "Appalachian Spring."

Externally, I'm involved in all sorts of things, from filmmaking and writing music and books, to being involved with various organizations and developing an understanding of structure and human accomplishment; all these things are really interesting to me.

Along with these pursuits, there are certain external circumstances that I like: I like where I live, I like the friends I have. One of the biggest changes I'm working towards right now is to have more time to really do all the various things I love doing.

Incidentally, I write about this quite extensively in *Your Life As Art*, particularly in the chapter, "What Matters."

Ever since I've known you, you have always put tremendous emphasis on structure, which I see as being the province of science. Yet you're also an artist, and you're unique in the whole realm of personal development and personal growth in that you approach this field as an artist. What unique perspective does all this bring to bear on your work?

Structure is one of the rudiments in every art, as well as science; it's something you learn and internalize. All composers study structure; there's visual structure and poetic structure; there's a certain dramatic structure screenwriters have to master in order to write a really workable screenplay.

Structure is one of the fundamentals.

About 25 years ago, when I began teaching people the creative process as applied to their lives, I began to notice two distinct patterns. Some people would create their goals, then pursue them with momentum; those goals became the foundation for their future success.

Other people set their goals and held onto them for a period of time— but then there would be some sort of reversal, in the course of which they would lose those goals. This might show up as the financial success that turned into a financial loss; the great relationship that didn't last; the project that was really good at first, but then suddenly wasn't. This presented a question for me.

"What's going on?!"

Exactly! As I studied this phenomenon, I began to discover the underlying structures involved, structures that made all the difference between whether a person was going to be able to build upon success or go through reversals after having had some success. The first pattern is advancing, the second is oscillating, like a rocking chair. People try to create all kinds of changes in their lives, but if they don't change the underlying structure, eventually those improvements will inevitably reverse themselves.

In studying organizations, for example, we'll find a predictable oscillating pattern: organizations build up capacity and then downsize, build up capacity again, then downsize again. Or, they decentralize decision-making, then centralize decision-making, then decentralize it, then centralize it again. They go on an acquisition spree, then divest, then acquire, then divest; or they invest in the company, then they do cost-cutting, then they invest, and then cut costs.

I began to investigate this extensively and developed a field called "Structural Dynamics," which deals with these underlying structures.

My book, *The Path of Least Resistance*, lays out three principles. The first is that energy moves where it's easiest for it to go. Second, the underlying structure of anything will determine where that path leads; it's the riverbed that determines where the water will lead. Without a change of that underlying structure, the energy will always move in the same pathway.

Sometimes, by the way, that path may happen to take you through great difficulty, conflict and hardship! The term "easier" can be misleading; it's not necessarily "easy" from your subjective point of view.

The third principle is that *you can change that underlying structure*. This principle gives us great hope for real, lasting change:

If you can change the underlying structures of your life or your organization, you can begin to more reliably produce the results you want and create those things that really matter to you.

This principle means we can organize our lives around those things that really contribute to our vision of how we would like our lives and our world to be.

Of all the things you've created and accomplished in the last 20 or 30 years, what are you most proud of?

My children. [laughs]

Why do you laugh as you say that?

Because I didn't really have to do anything! It's luck, really. I suppose we had some influence on how we raised them, but I don't know... [laughs].

Truthfully, there are quite a few things I'm really excited about; I sort of have six different careers going on at once. I'm very happy with the invention of Structural Dynamics; I think it's a powerful tool and incisive insight into the world. I'm really happy with some of the films I've made and some of the theater productions I've directed.

I'm also pretty happy with my books, although I'm always trying to be a better writer; this has been a challenge for me, because I don't really have a lot of talent. My original writings read like translations from the German! [laughs]

I'm always working on how to write better, how to express more complex thoughts more simply, to have the rhythms flow and have it be truly entertaining, so it genuinely interests the reader....

I've known you for over 25 years, and I've always observed that you have a tremendous quest for developing, for getting better and better at what you do.

I refuse to take a position where I think, "Well, here's the Truth with a capital T, now I'm just going to convert people to it." I'm always rethinking everything, including my own theories. How do we know this? Is it true? What are we seeing here? Why is this happening? There's a tremendous inner curiosity in me.

I'm not satisfied with the various worldviews that people adopt and then try to live their lives by. I think "the mystery" is a real mystery. Why do we exist? Where are we? Is there purpose to life? These are questions that people answer all the time, but they answer by means of various concepts.

I think the accurate answer is, *we don't know*. If you're not looking for "the answer" to life, then you can be more of an explorer.

And by the way, just because we don't know doesn't mean we can't believe in God, for example, or have spiritual leanings. It simply means we really can't insist upon them. In fact, a wonderful thing about the creative process

is that it's philosophically neutral. People from all walks of life, from all different cultures and belief systems, have the arts.

So it's less a matter of looking for the answers, and more one of looking for the questions?

No, not exactly; in fact, once you understand that these things are fundamentally unanswerable, then you suspend the questions. Once you suspend the questions, then there are other involvements you can have in life that can very important on their own level.

For example, I don't know whether or not there is really a purpose to life—but I certainly know that we can invent a purpose for ourselves. Viktor Frankl makes this point in his great book, *Man's Search for Meaning*:

**We can invent meaning for ourselves,
and when we do, we can begin to direct
our lives more successfully.**

What I'm trying to do in *Your Life As Art* is to get at certain complexities without tainting it with any dogma, and that's tricky to do.

For example, there's a chapter called, "A Look Deeper In," in which I describe the importance of being in contact with your own source of your creative process. This is not something that can be dictated by other people's experiences or beliefs, or even by your own experiences and beliefs.

You have to look without an agenda, rather than with an agenda, because people who look more deeply into themselves invariably start with what it is they're going to find. I suggest that you seek to look without an agenda, so that you haven't rigged the game.

**Do that, and whatever you find is what
you find— and that, for me, is where
the discovery is genuinely exciting.
Living your life on the edge of true
discovery.**