

Rodney Walker...

MAN ON A MISSION

Many “know” Rodney Walker best as the grant writing guru behind Grant Central USA, but behind the thousand-watt smile is a man who loves life, cares about people, and loves empowering them to be their absolute best.



Hailing from Dallas, TX, Rodney attributes his passion for helping others and his entrepreneurial spirit to his parents and the environment he was raised in. He grew up watching his mother helping and empowering others not only in words but in action, and his father as a business owner. “It was something that was ‘caught’ and lives on in me to this day,” says Rodney. The journey to make what Grant Central USA is today is the culmination of many life lessons that Rodney has had.

Positioning For Purpose

After moving to California in pursuit of a graduate degree, the desire to become a grant writing expert didn’t just fall out of the sky. Rodney’s interest in grant writing was piqued while working as a Director for a non-profit organization. He was blown away by how the contracted grant writer could convey information in such a way that would ultimately result in receiving thousands of dollars in grant funding. His initial motivation was to learn how to write grants to get more of his youth projects funded so he looked to the contractor for some insight. Unfortunately, the contractor didn’t want to compro-

mise her livelihood and had no interest in sharing what she knew about grant writing with him. However, his intention to help others and obtain funding for causes close to his heart was what motivated Rodney to learn it for himself.

Success in any area does not come without some failures during the learning process, and truth be told, Rodney’s first crack at grant writing was not a hit. He could’ve wallowed in discouragement but with determination, he allowed it to fuel him in learning how to write grants that get funded. For him, that meant listening to a frank critique of his proposal from the program officer and ultimately, furthering his education to learn the craft.

While in grad school, his purpose of grant writing to help others expanded and a paradigm shift took place. “It all started with an idea, a seed that was sown by the words of one of my professors,” says Rodney. When his grant writing professor recognized that he had a knack for grant writing and suggested he consider being a consultant or doing it as a business, it was a pivotal moment for Rodney. The encouraging words that were spoken in 2006 gave him the confidence to consider

grant writing as a career option.

Starting a business is often fueled by desire, but in Rodney’s case, GCU was “birthed” out of necessity. Months after obtaining a second master’s degree in Non-Profit Management, he was still unable to find employment, and his circumstances nudged him into starting his own business. According to Rodney, he knew he had to do something different. It came down to whether he wanted to eat and so he utilized what skills he had. “I wasn’t going to sit around and wait for someone to give me an opportunity when I’m well able to make an opportunity,” says Rodney. “That’s the day I hired myself.” After that “Aha!” moment, he put on a suit, got business cards, and was determined to build a network for business, working with what he had. He asked for potential leads from those that he knew and after following up, a few of those leads eventually turned into business.

It is said that we should not despise small beginnings, and back then, he had no clue that it would lead him to building Grant Central USA with \$357 million secured in funding. Yet, that seed started germinating and now, years later, Rodney says he’s having the time of his life. “I’m getting the chance to

help hundreds and thousands of people...I'm impacting people, helping them to learn to write grants, and then they're turning around and helping to raise money for organizations that are helping the people on the front line."

After acquiring the skillset, Rodney positioned himself for business in a few different ways. Initially, he asked friends to give him referrals to potential clients, he sold his professor's book at an event and began attracting clients by teaching what he knew at local workshops at minimal cost. Oftentimes, he gave more value than what he was get-

Turning Life's Lemons to Lemonade

Of course, one can't skip down the road of success without hitting a few roadblocks, and Rodney has seen his share of challenges. Just as things began taking off with GCU, the weight of personal losses in his life nearly sent him into a tailspin. New endeavors typically come with a learning curve, and Rodney had to simultaneously learn sales and marketing. "These things were new and I felt uncomfortable and



ting paid for, but as he sowed value to people his client base began to grow. A free grant writing workshop yielded one client who would request him to teach a large class, which led to more clients and classes. He saw his students begin to raise money as a result of his classes.

Reflecting on his days as a struggling grad student, he remembers being so broke he couldn't afford a website. Instead, he got a web page connected with a non-profit trade association at a student discount. From that, an organization reached out for his consulting services. Once he started marketing, he landed a few key partnerships that brought financial stability with an extended two-year contract for \$25,000. As his confidence increased, he began to see one victory after another, over time.

awkward because I didn't know what I was doing," Rodney says, but once he learned it, it required him to change his mindset.

What about the naysayers and those who didn't catch his entrepreneurial vision? Rodney simply ignored them and acted as if they didn't exist. "There's so many people that are afraid to do what you're doing and they don't believe in themselves enough to step out," he says. "So, people like that, I chose not to tell them what I was doing."

Through tenacity and resilience, he spun his challenging situation into a positive one. Sure, the grant writing road had some bumps along the way, but one of the things that propelled him forward was the example of his parents, who were hard workers who never quit in challenging times. To this day, the thought that there are a lot of peo-

ple he needs to prove wrong serves as motivation when discouragement tries to creep in. As the saying goes, "what doesn't kill you makes you stronger," and he believes he's a living testimony of that.

Rodney's Recipe for Success

After starting GCU, Rodney saw financial success—proof that someone would pay him for his grant writing expertise. For him, there was a learning process for success that goes beyond money and it's gotten him to where he is today. According to Rodney, success in the grant writing field—or any other field—requires a combination of things achieve it.

Having the right information is essential. As one who is intentional regarding success, he believes that to do anything, it all starts with a thought. "We all have, right now, what we have based upon our thinking," he says, "and if that's faulty, you're going to get faulty results." From our thoughts, we develop the necessary confidence in ourselves needed for success.

Another component for success according to Rodney is to be around the right people, not just physically but mentally, in order to develop and nurture the growth that needs to happen. If you're around the wrong people, you're only going to go as far as they are because they will influence you in a negative way.

One man's success is never gained with an island mentality. All along the way, Rodney had mentors whom he leaned on and learned from. In fact, at least half of them were not living, but he learned from their works that live on. "It was hearing the words by leaders (like Napoleon Hill, Earl Nightingale and Les Brown) on YouTube and reading the words they wrote in books that literally coached and guided me along." Instead of trying to do it on his own, Rodney also sought out other coaches who were further along than he was and knew more than he did.

A Boss Who's Bold, Brilliant–But Also Balanced

Being multi-talented can sometimes lead to becoming a “jack of all trades but a master of none,” and Rodney found himself with a lot of half-completed projects. “When I got to GCU, I said, ‘I’m not going to start anything else until I make this successful,’” he says. In essence, he narrowed his focus and put blinders on to make sure he did the things necessary to make Grant Central USA successful, and expanded thereafter. In doing so, Rodney now keeps himself balanced by not moving on to the next project until the project at hand is successful.

Another key to keeping himself balanced is having a team to help. As one who doesn’t care for busy paperwork and isn’t a fan of bookkeeping, Rodney says, “Why waste time doing something that I don’t love when I can pay a professional to do it?” He is also an advocate of outsourcing projects and hiring interns.

Building multiple streams of income is not for the weary, and as president of a multi-faceted company such as GCU, one might think that Rodney’s head would be on swivel with his hands in so many different things. However, like an architect, he has methodically designed his life the way he wants it to be, down to his business, his day, when he talks to people and where he wants to be.

One thing he does not play with is his time. Rodney says, “Time does not come back... [so] I choose to invest my time in ways that bring a return and allow me to have a richer and fuller life.” Growing up watching his father, a businessman with control of his time, Rodney realized this was appealing to him and his father’s example showed him what was possible.

He typically gives himself the first part of the day to think. “That’s where the worth is for me,” he says. “It’s in



my thinking and learning how to think about ways that bring great value to the world and bring money. In doing all of that...that’s transforming.”

Another way he acquires balance is by learning. He is an avid consumer of information with a serious intention to read up to four hours a day!

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Anyone who has experienced Rodney – even virtually – can feel he’s a ball of energy. “My work energizes me and adds life to me,” he says. “I bounce out of bed because I get a chance to do what I love to do! It’s not work, it’s play!” He likens his life to be like playing living Monopoly game every day. “I love to learn and rise to challenges. And when you taste victory, it’s almost like a game.” But don’t get it twisted. Rodney is quick to remind us that the “play” does require effort and focus, as well as a commitment to growing and learning new skills, which means you must become better than yesterday. The challenge in the play is in the focus, effort and discipline that is required. By

the same token, he knows when to turn down work and change environments to motivate or inspire himself. In fact, he’s one of the few who has managed to build self-care into his whole regimen so he doesn’t have to escape from his life to get it.

Stay Tuned ...

Aside from Grant Central USA, there are a couple of things coming down the pipeline. Rodney is excited to pass on the life lessons that he’s learned in terms of what it takes to succeed. He endeavors to share with others how to be successful and to enrich their overall lives.

Knowing first-hand what it takes to make money, he has also learned what it is to lose money and what it takes to save and grow it. “If you don’t have the tools, you will lose money. After having experienced it, I feel it’s my mission to share this knowledge with other people,” he says. Wealthy Lions is his latest project to help underserved communities to understand and transform their finances to create wealth for their families. “Why be uninformed and have a lot of bark and no bite when you could have a bite and create something that’s going to be helpful for you and your family for years to come,” he says.

After nearly 15 years, Grant Central USA has become a leading resource in the grant writing industry with an expansive library of webinars, online coursework and coaching modules. The audience has grown larger, but the essence of the mission in terms of impacting lives in a positive way, is still very much at the core of what Rodney is doing. Because technology extends his reach, he’s excited about the tremendous opportunity to empower more people to be bold, be brave, be brilliant and to take charge!

*By Nikki Smith
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