



The Music-Preneur Mindset Podcast

Ep79: Music-Preneur Spotlight: Robonzo

You're listening to Episode 79 of the Music-Preneur Mindset Podcast.

Hello! You're listening to [Episode 79: Music-Preneur Spotlight: Robonzo](#).

I'm your host, Suz - a mindset coach helping music professionals get clear on their goals and find the time to get it all done while maintaining a healthy work/life balance.

Balance is a very personal thing - it looks different for everyone. Sometimes a person looking in on your life may not see any semblance of balance or any cohesion between the things you do as you build the career you want.

Sometimes you may even surprise yourself on how your career is coming together and the turns it's taken throughout the years. But, at the end of the day, what matters is that you're doing or aiming to do what you love and learning along the way how to get closer to that lifestyle you deem to be balanced and fulfilling.

This week's Spotlight is on Roberto Hernandez, better known as Robonzo, a drummer, host of The Unstarving Musician's Podcast, and author of [The Unstarving Musician's Guide to Getting Paid Gigs](#).

A few months back I had the pleasure of being a guest on his podcast and a link to that episode, as well as a link to free access of a chapter of his book, can be found in this episode's show notes page: www.therockstaradvocate.com/ep79.

For over 15 years he's been a session musician and live performer, creating sustainable streams of income for himself through gigging - hence writing a book on how to do just that - and then expanded into creating a podcast that provides musicians with a greater insight into how other musicians build their careers and income streams.

In addition, he offers coaching to musicians who want to start getting paid more regularly for playing live while growing their audience along the way. His career may seem extremely varied to some, as he himself will tell you.

The beauty in his winding career path is that it allows him to have a fuller understanding and appreciation for what musicians go through in this business and enables him to provide a unique perspective as well as useful tips for making money as a full-time musician.

As you listen to our conversation you'll notice one strong thread throughout - the importance of serving others. That is the guiding light that connects all that Robonzo does and without it I'm sure his varied career would feel out of balance and unfulfilled.

I'm sure you'll find a lot of inspiration in what he has to share with us and afterwards I have some questions I'd love YOU to answer, so stick around at the end!

In the meantime, here is Robonzo:

Suz: Well Robonzo, thank you so much for joining us today!

Robonzo: It is my pleasure! Thanks for having me.

Suz: You've got a really great varied background. I've told our audience about it just a minute ago, but what I'm most curious about, given all of your experience being a live performer is, after fifteen plus years of experience being on stage, what is the biggest takeaway you've learned about this whole area of the business?

Robonzo: Sure, and thank you for the whole varied background thing. I always get this, you know when I'm speaking to people like yourself or even all the folks I have on my podcast. You know I had a short list because I thought about this ahead of time but probably the number one thing is serve, serve, serve. And by that I mean serve your bandmates, serve your audience, serve your venue and anyone else who's in the in the picture, you know, crew, because that'll just pay dividends the day of and many days after.

Suz: I think that's so great. We often talk on here about the whole "givers gain" mentality and you know coming from a place of service. I think that's fantastic for somebody with your

experience and expertise and that's your biggest takeaway - that speaks volumes!

How did you and how do you continue to sustain gig after gig, and I don't mean just monetarily because obviously you've built a great business doing that and it's something that you teach your audience, but how do you sustain mentally, emotionally, physically? What's something that you do to to make that happen?

Robonzo: Oh man. I was gonna say, 'That's easy!' but then in my head I backed up really quick because I had a recent experience where I just didn't feel like I was in a "good fit" situation. So probably the way to really stay into it, is to make sure that you're doing things that make you happy.

Make sure you're at the right gig. Be exactly where you want to be, and sometimes you gotta test things out and try it. But if it doesn't, you know, keep on serving and you bow out if you have to.

Suz: What are some of those things? What does "serving" look like to you if you can give us some examples, whether it's on stage, or off stage, or both?

Robonzo: Yeah in the moment on stage one of the things that has served *me* well, to use that word again, is to really pay attention to what is happening sonically with my bandmates on stage. Because in the moment when we're doing our thing, listening to *them* makes all the difference in the world for me and helps me serve the whole show, if you will - the audio experience.

Beyond that, we have to look at everyone as a team member, right? So it's been a long time, but I used to run into people that just really didn't give a lot of thought to how they were dealing with venues that they were booking at or sound and lighting crew people.

This really matters, I mean we're all working together in the venues, even down to the waitstaff, if you're in a place that has that kind of thing going on. Everyone there is your advocate. So yeah... top of the head answer.

Suz: What happens when you feel like the audience just isn't connecting or maybe the people in your band who you're playing with they're just out of sync... is there anything you do to kind

of ground yourself or not let it throw you? Like what happens when those gigs just don't align the way you were hoping?

Robonzo: That's a good question. You know sometimes you remind yourself about that paid rehearsal concept. Sometimes maybe the audience isn't there, literally or figuratively, with what's going on. Maybe some your bandmates aren't totally there, or for whatever reason they're not necessarily serving what's happening on stage or listening to what's going on.

Boy, sometimes it's just as simple as finding someone else in the band who's finding some humor in all this and try not to take yourself so seriously! And that's been one of my personal things that I always remind myself of and think about. A few of my close friends who are musicians that are so great at constantly constantly constantly lifting up others around them on stage and in rehearsals because I have, probably like a lot of others who are listening to this, I have a propensity for taking myself a little too seriously or my craft a little too seriously sometimes.

And I think it's helpful to step back, whether you can do it right then in the moment or afterwards just to kind of replay the whole thing in your head and remember don't take everything so seriously it makes it all a little better.

Suz: Totally! So are there things that you do maybe right before a gig or maybe during rehearsals to prepare to keep all that in the front of your head?

Robonzo: Sure. Well you know, you said one word "prepare." And preparation is probably my number two biggest thing I've learned and with a lot of preparation everything tends to fall into place much easier.

You know, I've learned so much from making so many mistakes over the years and we have to kind of forgive ourselves and try to learn from all those things, but also just trying to be as sharp as I can the day of or the night of and little things. You know, learn all the time.

One of my friends I mentioned before we started recording, Mike Dawson, who's managing editor at Modern Drummer, and he's a prolific musician, session guy, recording guy. I heard him on his podcast once saying that he'd recently started doing some sort of zinc or vitamin C supplement for his later night or late night gigs.

And he doesn't drink when he's doing, I don't know if he drinks that much at all anyway, but little things like that. He said his bandmates would often just be dead tired at the end of these really late nighters and he noticed he was feeling a lot better so, again, just kind of picking up all the tips you can along the way.

Suz: Totally! You know, I find it interesting, sometimes musicians just forget to ask one another, "Hey what did you do to prepare? That was a great show! Did you have any tips to share?"

Sometimes we forget that we've got that network right in front of us at the gigs we go to share tips and swap what works and what doesn't. That's great that you've been able to pick up those things from other people.

Robonzo: Yeah and you're reminding me I need to ask those friends of mine that I admire so much who are constantly lifting up others, myself included, like how do you do that? What's your motivation? I just want to know. It's so beautiful and I've never asked them.

Suz: Yeah I mean I don't know the exact reason for it but I think we we all just get so focused on our own stuff and I think there's also sometimes musicians give each other a bad rep for having competition - like, "They're not gonna want to share that with me or I want to pry." But so many just really can't wait for somebody to ask them.

Robonzo: I mean, gosh. I know some really great musicians and I've been surprised to find that they are a little withholding at times, but I think if we just keep giving usually you'll find it comes back.

Suz: Yeah I've noticed sometimes even with just industry professionals at conferences - I've had to train myself that if I do ask and they are standoffish about it, I have to remind myself that says more about them and just maybe what they've been through. Maybe they've been burned before and they're hesitant, so I usually if I get that resistance then I end up just offering something as you said like coming from a place of service and saying, "Okay you don't have to share but here's a tip that I do..." even if it's not related to the question I asked just to offer something.

It's like waving the white flag, like this is safe. I'm not here to take your spot or take something

without giving credit or something like that. So yeah it's like that turn the other cheek thing - give and give and if somebody doesn't want to give, give some more. It's always worked out.

Robonzo: Totally and sometimes it helps to remind people, and ourselves, that somebody's always gonna like them better or you better - whatever the situation calls for - that's just a fact. So it doesn't matter if you and I, for instance, were in the exact same markets and there was potential for some sort of competition it just doesn't matter because at the end of the day some people are gonna dig Suz a lot better!

Suz: or Robonzo! Sometimes you just click with who you click with and there's not always an explanation for it.

Robonzo: That's right.

Suz: That's wonderful. So speaking of giving and serving and sharing your talents and expertise, what made you go from gigging and making a good income to then saying, "I'm gonna coach," because again, we think a lot of people are just like, "Oooh I found the secret sauce and I'm just going to keep this to myself!"

What made you say, "No. It's time to to start coaching others through this and teaching them what I've learned" - how did that all get started? Kind of walk us through that process.

Robonzo: It started with an idea for a book because when I was in the Silicon Valley area playing music there it's got a vibrant in a blues and pop scene there, and I have always been a working musician, a gigging musician - a drummer specifically, so not much songwriting.

My work is with both covers and original acts. So I noticed that some of the people around me who I talked to on a regular basis as I was expanding my network in the music scene, I'd run into people that kind of had a down attitude about either venues or some of the people that they worked with and what it amounted in is they were struggling to play as much as they wanted to.

And then there was this revelation one year, before the end of December had come, that I had gigs booked for the entire following year, every month of the year. And it just occurred to me that, "I bet you at least some my friends would like to know how that worked for me," and as I

started putting pen to paper, so to speak, I got an idea that, "I bet others would like to know how I did it," or would be interested in my take and my experience and how it all happened for me.

And then I discovered some online marketers and because I must've at that time when I was about finished with the book, I must've had a thought of like, "I wonder if I could turn this into something a little bigger that serves as a community and not just a book," and somewhere in there I ran into some online podcasters and then came the encouragement to do more with it.

Perhaps the first thing was, "You gotta start a podcast," so I started The Unstarving Musician's Podcast and then it just sort of went natural from there. I had to find the exact niche. I was pretty close when I started but it's narrowed down a little bit, and it may go through some changes again, but what it's evolved to for me has been, you know, I talked to all these indie artists who go through the various challenges that they do and they learn the various things that they do, so I try to have conversations with them about those specific things every week so that they can share with their peers and their fans can check in, too, and hear it.

As you alluded to, they're entrepreneurial people and just people with feelings at the end of the day, so that's kind of how I got here.

And I never thought of myself as a coach and thanks for saying that - that's been something that's evolved as well, you know just trying to figure out ways to sustain the whole thing and serve people in different ways that I can, so I have gotten into coaching and I'm still looking at the different types of things that I might do. You and I offline were talking and I was asking you for tips on public speaking and things like that so just an ever-evolving process.

Suz: What I love about that that you just said was you have this need, this urge to serve and share what you've learned and you didn't sit there waiting to say, "Well I don't know how I'll structure it" or "I don't have a full business in mind yet" or "Am I a coach? Am I this? Let me sit and think about what exactly I am and what exactly to call myself."

It's just, you know, these things grow organically and we don't have to wait until we have every single answer. I always teach about clarity and clarity is important but you just need clarity on the first step. It's like, "Okay, I want to write a book," and as you started that evolves and

changes and morphs into other things but you knew you wanted to start so you made the decision and you took the action.

And I think that's so important to hear that you're still figuring things out. I, myself, am still figuring things out. We all are no matter what stage we're at, and I think it's so important for people out there thinking, "Maybe I have something to teach but I don't know what it looks like yet" - just start and let it guide itself for a little bit!

Robonzo: Yeah, absolutely! And things change so fast both in the music industry and the music scenes be they local or if you're trying to look at getting yourself out there on a national or international level, and then the whole online world which musicians more and more are dabbling in, and people who are more focused on the mentoring side than they are the music side ... everything's changing constantly, so while it's great and I have done the exercise you know to sort of map the ideas out and start pursuing them, it's a long game just like music.

I'm being reminded of this, everything's a long game and by the time you get done with the one phase things may have changed for the other ones you had big plans for, and you may find that your passion has suddenly evolved in another area altogether!

Suz: Absolutely! That kind of feeds into my next question - as you've been helping and teaching more artists and peers and as you've been sharing your expertise, with your podcast The Unstarving Musician which is great, I love the name - it just speaks to this mindset very similar to The Music-Preneur Mindset which is you don't need to starve and you don't need to suffer for your art, you can be thriving and have a sustainable career - why do you think artists get stuck in a 'starving musician' mindset?

Why do you think the the default is 'starving musician'?

Robonzo: We have to remember it is a long game and I'm reminded of something one of my guests recently said, and she's testament that it's a long game - she's been playing for probably decades now. A prolific artist, and I said in the post for the episode she's basking in the joy of it.

It also reminds me that we have to try to take a wide-angle view. I guess it's this is way with anything that we have to take a wide-angle view and look at all the options and realize that changes, though they may seem sometimes a little off course, they're not an end to the journey.

Sometimes they're a needed thing to feed the journey and I'm thinking specifically of like I've had artists who maybe have had to start and stop where they're playing full time and then they ended up getting some sort of day job or a part time job or they were playing part time and they had a day job they quit that and then they're thinking about working part time, so we just have to figure these things out.

And the cool thing is, is that for musicians now there are just so many things that we can do to fulfill our interests and add to the machine that is our art beyond just the making music. Although, for me ideally, and a lot of people I talk to, I think the end product of the music is the ultimate, but I talk to so many artists that get a ton of joy out of doing exactly what you do and mentoring people or managing online communities where they're helping groups of people, so there's a lot of different things we can do.

Suz: That's great! You know I have some artist saying to me 'Should I start a podcast? I mean I know podcasting is big right now' but like do you want to? Does it bring you joy? Is that what lights you up or, as you said, is managing an online community or just being there for your fellow peers when you're at shows and you have something to offer them? You know there's so many ways to be impactful and to grow your own community and to grow your own place in the world and in the industry, I think it that's so great to keep in mind that there's no one way.

When you've talked with other artists or even when you've seen, you know, you've played with so many people and you've share the stage before so many times, what do you believe is the biggest mistake that artists make when it comes to booking shows or preparing for shows?

I feel like there's so much that eludes them about being able to sustain as a gigging musician, being able to make a sustainable income from it. You've been able to do it. Without giving away too many of your secrets, what do you think is something that really trips them up or something that they don't really think about enough?

Robonzo: Well it started to click when I realized that relationships are such a huge thing and they start really in your music community. So one of the biggest examples are learning experiences I've had. And I've heard over and over from different people is when I moved from Dallas Fort Worth to the San Francisco Bay Area I didn't know a lot of people there, and I just took some time off.

And this was a mistake I'd made before, taking time off of playing, so I'm probably not playing for a year or more. And as fate would have it, my first apartment that my wife and I lived in, there happened to be an expat from England who was a musician - not his full time thing, but he was a musician and just had a very enthused attitude about everything musical around.

And he turned me on to a blues jam that was hosted in San Jose at a formerly very famous blues club call JJ's blues, and it was hosted by a phenomenal artist named Lara Price. I remember going there and somewhat reluctantly signing up to sit in and, you know, if you're drummer it's a big deal to go and be any good at these jams because they just don't see a ton of drummers. They see a lot of guitar players and maybe harp players or singers and maybe some bass players, but in the rhythm section they don't get a lot of people, especially drummers for some reason I don't know why.

So I go play a couple tunes and she was really kind to me and telling me I need to come back up. She nicknamed me Dallas because I was from Texas. So I did that a couple times and I discovered this vibrant community of people who many of whom didn't play full time but many of were just great, you know, great players! And one thing leads to another, I start meeting more musicians and I find myself gigging again, but probably the biggest lesson I've learned was that we have to be actively growing our community.

And sometimes we find ourselves in moving in life to a new place like I did, but I suppose that these music communities, whether they're local or they're on your tour schedule, they're ever-changing. So it's good to be aware of that and know that when one scene changes or goes away another one is very likely to come up. And it's all of course related to population density of the area, but that's a that's a huge thing I think putting yourself out there.

And today, with things like Instagram and YouTube and Facebook, we can put ourselves out there so much in a new way. I shouldn't say so much better, but in a new way where we can put our gift out there and start conversations and I think we we absolutely need that face time and we need to go play live for people if that's our thing especially. But being able to showcase your talent in some little videos and immersing yourself in some of those communities is fantastic, too.

Suz: Wow. Those are all really great tips. When you were saying about population density and

the music scenes changing and kind of having your finger on that pulse, is that something you follow now? I mean I'm sure with all your years experience in this you've garnered quite a portfolio of relationships at this point to go after certain gigs, but would you recommend artists kind of do some more research on the areas more so than the venues? Say somebody was booking a tour, what would you recommend in terms of doing their due diligence with where they reach out to play?

Robonzo: Yeah well social communities are great, right? The musician communities and the areas like on Facebook, for instance, are great. Remember to always be building your email list wherever you go. The people that want to keep up with you, let them! Serve them through occasional contact with an email, so keep building that because you'll build momentum over time if you're not already doing that.

And if you already have a decent list because you have been touring around or whatever, leverage those folks and ask them what they know! If you're the style of player who can do house shows, house concerts do as Shannon Curtis does. She plans her entire year around the release of an album and a house concert tour all based on her community. She doesn't even play the regular venues that I've spent most of my life playing at because she finds that her *strongest* relationship building and the listening rooms and the strongest fans are at these house shows, so that would be one thing.

Certainly asking your peers is huge or getting to know the people that are playing those places. You and I were talking about that there are tons of people that are super giving and are just not worried about any sort of competition nonsense in their head and will share so much with you so always ask.

Suz: I hope everyone out there is taken some notes, although I'll be a listing the bullet points in the show notes, so be sure to go to those as well!

What type of mindset do you think is necessary to have in order to build a sustainable career in this industry? I mean, what has served you best so far when things get hard or things get murky and you don't maybe see your next steps as clearly? What has been your outlook or maybe something that you do to get your outlook back to where it needs to be - what would you say mindset wise is necessary to keep going in this industry?

Robonzo: Well get yourself a mentor, get yourself a coach and also something that happened to me just this week, and I think it's because I had a little insomnia which is not a common event for me, but I was working on some stuff for the musician community and a small business community that I manage and just the creativity was not happening.

And then this morning I was listening to an audio presentation for, I think it's dharmatalk.org that a friend turned me on to, and the first thing that this person started talking about was the basics - focusing on the basics.

And I thought that's exactly what I did yesterday! I didn't feel like I had a drop of creativity in me. I was working on some emails and I was like, "I don't even know what I'm gonna say this week," so I went to the basics.

I worked on something that had to be done. I worked on the templates I started crafting the email and I'll do this little thing where I'm like, "Say something amazing here," you know and I'm basically getting ready to insert the content.

So getting back to basics is probably one of the best things we can do. And you know, as a musician sometimes that's going back and working on your chops or your reading skills or maybe that one thing that's super easy to do that you weren't planning to do today, but maybe you're making some phone calls or sending out some emails to venues because you just couldn't get whatever it is out of you that you had scheduled to get out of you.

So taking a break or taking a step back is huge which speaks to taking care of yourself. So we really have to take care of ourselves - stay rested, do the things that let you recharge. Whether it's taking ten minutes a day to stare out into the clouds and do nothing or take a walk with your dog as I do, or meditate, or whatever your thing is.

Suz: That's really great. Those are some great tips and I'll make sure that those bullet points are in the show notes because that's really important stuff - especially the going back to basics! That really resonates. So as we wrap up, we have some rapid fire questions that I ask every guest. As you look back, if you could time travel, what is one lesson you would go back and tell your younger self?

Robonzo: I probably would have talked to those around me who were doing what I wanted to

do. When I was younger, I wanted to play music professionally. I wanted to study music. I didn't do those things. Yes, I did end up being a gigging, working musician and people were inviting me to sub all the time and here I am with this whole podcast thing and community thing, but that wasn't how it started and I wasn't encouraged.

I was encouraged to go to business school, not music school, so I probably would have latched on to people [who] were right under my nose - to be around them and try to understand what was keeping me, I know the things that I'll say kept me away, but it's really a mindset thing, as you say and a confidence thing and a desire thing. So I would have done that, and I think that still works today.

Suz: If you could have one superpower, what would it be?

Robonzo: Music theory. It's funny - I'm a late-life learner with theory. You know, I dabbled in some electives because I'm going to business and marketing school, right? But I dabbled in some electives in music, so I had some basic understandings. But because of this wonderful world we live in, we meet all these people who have been exposed to it all their life, I got some encouragement to ask, and I picked up a couple of the quintessential theory books for drummers for instance. And I'm working my way through those just to bone up on it!

Suz: Yeah I always wish I could just know how to play the piano. Like I don't want to sit and learn it, I just wish I could sit down and it would just come out.

Robonzo: And play at the party, right? You know and just entertain everyone.

Suz: Right! If you could invite three musicians, living or dead, to your house for dinner who would they be?

Robonzo: Charlie Watts, the drummer from The Stones would be one just because he was a Rolling Stone and I guess the whole drummer thing. Maybe Sheryl Crow. Love her music. There's a guy, I think his name was Eddie Kramer - he was a big producer of some of the iconic or engineer, probably producer, but engineer of some of the iconic albums of the late sixties and seventies.

There's another, Brendan O'Brien, another producer who was really doing some iconic things in

the nineties. I think it would be really fun to to learn about them and their musicality and why what they did stood out so much.

Suz: Very interesting. I would bring some wine to that dinner! What actionable would you like to leave our guests with? I usually have a worksheet for them, but when I have an interview I leave it up to the person I'm interviewing to give them a task. What would you like our audience to go do this week?

Robonzo: Probably reach out for help because you know you're struggling somewhere and help is underneath your nose. I think I used that expression earlier, but it could be Suz, it could be me, it could be one of your bandmates, it could be someone you've never spoken to, it could be one of those online communities we were talking about, but reach out for help and consider giving yourself regular exposure to something like a mastermind group or a coach.

Suz: I couldn't have said it any better. It's so important just to ask and to seek out. So thank you so much for being here, and everybody listening please go ahead and take that wonderful advice that Robonzo has just given us - ask for help.

And if you'd like help from Robonzo, we have all of his links in our show notes. Please be sure to go follow and subscribe to The Unstarving Musician Podcast - it's a wonderful resource. Go listen to it. Reach out to Robonzo on social media, and thank you so much for taking the time to be with us today!

Robonzo: Hey, it was an honor! Thank you very much.

Suz: Great.

If there's another takeaway from this conversation, aside from the importance of serving others, it's to act before you feel ready - because you'll never feel ready - so do it anyway!

I wanna thank Robonzo for sharing his insight with us and his tips and resources can all be found in the show notes www.therockstaradvocate.com/ep79.

I'd also love to know - how do YOU serve your audience? Or, how would you like to serve your audience? Feel free to shoot me an email and let me know! Reach out to

suz@therockstaradvocate.com and let me know about the impact you'd like to have on your own community.

If you're not sure how to make that impact happen, don't worry, we can talk about it and we'll figure it out together.

Until next time, Rock/Star! Have a wonderful week and I hope to see you back here next time so we can get grounded to get rising! Take care.