

Chapter 23

Interview with Robert A. Robicheaux, Ph.D.

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1. Where did you grow up? Do you think that it has any impact on your life's work?

I was born and raised in New Orleans which is a very multicultural city. As a child there in the 1950s, even though our schools were segregated, our playgrounds were not. New Orleans then was a community of several different languages and cultures. My mother, for example, spoke only French until she was 12 years old. We had then many French, Spanish, Irish, Greek and, of course, African American segments throughout the city. Having a chance to interact with very ethnic families made it very easy for me to engage people in the workplace domestically and internationally.

2. Where did you go to school? Why there?

I earned my B.S., MBA and PhD degrees at Louisiana State University (LSU) in 1969, 1972 and 1974. I chose LSU because it was “THE” state university in Louisiana and I had aspirations to go to Law School there.

3. What did you do after your first degree (if second degree, where was that done, what did you do after that?) How did you get into your first major area?

I earned a B.S. in Business with a degree in Marketing in May 1969. I began school as an accounting student but discovered that the work of accounting was of no interest to me. Upon

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graduation I was admitted to Law School at LSU but I was called to active duty in the UA Army National Guard. I was fortunate to serve in the Louisiana Army National Guard Military Band at Fort Polk, Louisiana. I was released from Active duty in December and Law School admissions were limited to Fall (September then) entry. Former business professors invited me to enter the LSU School of Business MBA program on a National Defense Education Fellowship that paid a very decent wage and covered all tuition. So, I delayed Law School and earned my MBA.

During those studies in the MBA program, I met a young professor, Adel El Ansary, who had grown up in Egypt and earned his PhD at Ohio State University. His passion for teaching and knowledge of business theory and practice caused me to reconsider my career aspirations. He enticed me to enter the PhD program.

4. Have you had any particularly significant mentor's in your career?

Professor El Ansary was and remains a significant mentor to me. He was raised in a very significant Egyptian family with global interests. We have engaged in research and published scholarly articles and maintained a friendship for 40 years.

Other key mentors include a senior professor of Marketing at Tennessee David Cravens who moved to the University of Texas at Dallas and Barry Mason who hired me at Alabama and went on to be the dean of the Culverhouse School of Commerce and Business Administration there for 15 years.

5. How has your career evolved?

I have held Business faculty positions at the University of Tennessee (1974 – 1977), University of Alabama (1977 – 2004) and the University of Alabama at Birmingham (2004 to present). This is my 40th year as a professor of business. I went to Tennessee because it has a leading program

in Marketing and Transportation. I worked there with logistics scholars who were among the very best and who have gone on to become recognized as some of the very best in that field.

During my stay at Tennessee, the chairman of Alabama's Department of Marketing pursued me to join what was a department undergoing tremendous "repositioning." Alabama's marketing department had several older professors who had achieved national recognition. They had attracted a new dean from the Harvard Business School, Jack Fielden, and made a strong commitment to scholarly research and PhD program development. A new department chairman was named, Barry Mason, who went on to become the dean at Alabama for two decades. What sealed the deal to cause me to move to Alabama from Tennessee is an offer that raised my base salary by 50%.

Within the first five years at Alabama, we hired six new faculty members from some of the finest programs in the country and established Alabama as a national leader in scholarly research and PhD graduate productivity in Marketing. During my stay there I chaired 22 doctoral dissertations and have placed those students across the US and beyond.

In 1993, I was offered the opportunity to become the Coordinator of the Marketing Program and appointed to an endowed professorship, the Bruno Professor of Retail Marketing. That appointment provided financial support for research which enabled me to attract top PhD students as the endowment could be used to cover their empirical data collection costs.

I came to UAB in 2004 to chair a department of Marketing and Industrial Distribution (ID). The ID program is a joint Engineering and business degree program that produces industrial sales professionals. Our graduates are trained to sell very technical industrial products and work for companies like General Electric, Motion Industries, Consolidated Electrical Distributors and others.

By 2005 I became aware that the huge health care industry in Birmingham had caused Birming-

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