

Writers Come Home



new career – first, as a columnist writing about networking for the San Francisco Chronicle, then as a best-selling author of a whole series of

self-help/how-to books.

Now RoAne is in demand as a speaker on the seminar circuit and works one-on-one as a consultant with other writers who are trying to land their first book deal.

She is currently working on an update of her signature book, “How to Work a Room: The Ultimate Guide to Networking and Savvy Socializing,” which HarperCollins plans to reissue next spring. Another of her classics, “The Secrets of Savvy Networking: How to Make the Best Connections for Business and Personal Success” (Audio Renaissance), was released as an audio CD last December.

The author cites her liberal-arts education at Illinois as the source of much of the practical wisdom she imparts to others.

“My [UI] experience was wonderful for me,” she said. “We LAS majors are well-rounded and versatile in so many areas. We’re the Renaissance people ... we can talk to people.”

Plus, RoAne said, chuckling, “I can watch [the television program] ‘Jeopardy’ and get the answers right in every category.”

Another important lesson she learned at the University was picked up outside the classroom.

“I lived in a sorority house – Phi Sigma Sigma. Almost 40 years later, my dearest friends are those women spread out across the country,” RoAne said.

“[Attending college] can be ... life-changing. But if you don’t make friends, if you stay in touch with no one, you miss out on forming lifelong friendships with people,” she said.

RoAne parlayed that recognition into a tip repeated in nearly all of her books: “Get out there’ ... that’s the theme of everything,” she said.

Getting out there is something to which Pete Mockaitis, another Writers Come Home panelist, can relate. Although Mockaitis, author of “The Student Leader’s Field Guide” (Optimality Press), graduated just this past spring, he has been getting out there since middle school and learning all he can about what it takes to be a leader. Back in his hometown of Danville, when other boys his age were thumbing through comic books, “I was always reading books about leadership because I thought it was fun,” Mockaitis said.

Throughout middle school, high school and his years at Illinois (where he majored in finance and organizational administration), Mockaitis was involved in extracurricular activities ranging

from student council to band to drama to the speech team. He established a Model United Nations Club at the University, where his role was that of secretary general –

“like Kofi Annan,” Mockaitis said. He also served on the Illinois State Board of Education’s student advisory council and was the human resources partner for the Office for Technical Resources Consulting, a student-run operation that advises campus units and local businesses.

More often than not, this active student was first to sign on for leadership roles within the groups he joined. But when he sought out books for guidance on how to lead an organization effectively, he was disappointed.

“I read a lot of books but was frustrated because what I found was not applicable to students,” Mockaitis said. “The emphasis was on businessmen. For instance, they would talk about compensation. Well, there is no compensation in a volunteer student organization – at least not the monetary kind.”

Other books he came across “had a classroom feel” or were “corny, motivational-speaker-type books with no real information that could have immediate results for your organization,” Mockaitis said.

Finally, he took the bait from his good friend, Michael Wiggers ’06 LAS. “He said – about five times – ‘You need to write a book,’” Mockaitis recalled.

“The Student Leader’s Field Guide” by Pete Mockaitis

On the subject of time:

Perhaps the greatest enigma of time is that nobody has enough of it, yet we almost always succeed in wasting it. Time is different from every other resource we utilize. When we don’t have money, we don’t buy excess clothing. Yet when we don’t have time, we still fritter it away on whatever may pop up. Perhaps the explanation behind such odd resource waste is that we don’t think of time as a resource. Everybody knows that time is precious and should be utilized carefully, but few people treat time with the respect that it deserves.

So, he did. Initially, Mockaitis began working on it with Wiggers, but when his friend developed other interests, Mockaitis stayed the course on his own. He wrote in fits and starts, composing big chunks during school breaks.

Although Mockaitis eventually landed a book contract with a small, Texas-based publisher, he decided to cash in a mutual fund and use the proceeds to launch his own publishing company, Optimality Press.

“My friends will tell you I use the word ‘optimal’ a lot,” Mockaitis said, explaining that the word derives from a concept applicable in engineering, manufacturing, production and economics.

“I overuse it, in fact,” he said, laughing. “It’s about always picking the best possible outcome, given value, constraints and resources.”

