

**Expert Interview I with Steven Rosenbaum, Filmmaker, Digital Explorer,  
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**Including |** thoughts on seeing hope in innovation, and how embracing diversity grows your network of voices and makes the work stronger

>> Steven guest curated Strands on May 26, 2022. [Read it here.](#)

**Tell us a little bit about yourself and what keeps you busy. How did you end up doing what you're doing today?**

I've always wanted to invent things - create things. In high school I was a magician. I liked the performing part, but I also liked building illusions. In many ways my life in media comes from that. Today, I'm working hard to find the nexus between issues and ideas. The internet, which I love, has unleashed a cavalcade of problems. So I travel between amazing thinkers – Ph.D.'s and company founders, and the most impactful media and technology companies of our time. TikTok meets the New York Times. The solutions to our most vexing issues can be found in connecting people who want to build positive change.

**What excites you most about what you do?**

I'm an unfailing optimist. And the passion and drive of a generation of young builders is thrilling. They're not ignoring the charges, but they see hope in innovation, as do I. Deep in my DNA I've always been a Curator, looking around corners for something and challenging to embrace and share.

**What beliefs define your approach to work? How would you define your leadership style?**

I'm in favor of embracing risk. Rapid prototyping, experimentation, and interaction is my happy place. I'm in favor of leading by example. There's no job or task I won't do. But I'm also still a magician at heart, so I encourage people to embrace the things they love and care about and bring their whole selves to work. I'm not a big fan of people that want to argue against things, by which I mean - I don't think you innovate by subtraction. Innovation is a participatory sport.

## **What has been the most rewarding project you've worked on, and why?**

Yikes. I'm not sure there is one favorite. I loved MTV News Unfiltered, I loved iWitness for CBS, I loved everyone about the Magnify.net curation platform, at the MediaLab I loved all the Challenge Grant demo days, the Knight Foundation Local News, and AI convenings. I guess I'd say, all the things I've done that embraced change, and then did the hard work to use the crossroads of technology and storytelling to make knowledge more sharable and engaging. Oh, and Curation Nation, I loved writing it, sharing it, and bringing curation into the popular lexicon.

## **We are big believers in diversity -- Not only because we believe in equality, but because we also think it's better for business. The Black Lives Matter movement has shaped industry conversations around both global injustice, and also lack of representation in our industry. How do you frame these kinds of conversations, both internally and with clients? Is there an emphasis on action, or are the conversations really more about communication?**

Ok, this is an important and hard question. I think if we're honest, we are all at least in part a member of a tribe. So as a leader you need to be honest about the diversity, or lack thereof, of diversity in your organization. In my last gig, my Board wasn't as diverse as it needed to be. And changing that was hard - in part because as the Exec you don't get to choose the Board, it chooses you. But incremental change doesn't work - it's too damn slow. So you have to embrace it, look it straight in the eye. Do the participants on this panel reflect the diversity in our space? If not, you have to hold your team to look straight at it, and not except a tight deadline as an excuse for falling back to your friends or network. Also, it's important to know that different participants have different needs. It's work, but in the end, embracing diversity grows your network of voices and makes the work stronger.

## **Switching gears a bit, how do you find time to balance personal interests with your career? Do you believe work/life balance is possible? Anything you've implemented that you recommend that others try?**

I have no idea what you're talking about. My work is my life, and always has been. Magician, Author, Inventor, Curator, Startup Builder, Filmmaker. I wouldn't have it any



other way. For some, a weekend on the golf course is 'balance' - for me, it's deep in a documentary, or building a web site, or posting on TikTok, or dinner out with friends. Politics, Media, Tech. Rinse, repeat.

### **What's your media diet? Where do you find inspiration?**

I'm ravenous. I listen to 10 podcasts, read 20 websites, search the web. Scour twitter. Poke around in Reddit and even Parlor. I'm on all the streaming services. I'm a curator, remember - so I'm constantly on the lookout for new voices.

### **As you know, we believe there is so much value in having a wide range of teachers. What's the best piece of advice/knowledge you've stolen, and who/where'd you steal it from?**

I have three. David Rose told me - a long time ago, "I bet the Jockey, not the horse." I'm less concerned with check boxes of previous work when I hire, I look for people that are curious, self-motivated, and fun. Sometimes that works great, like the time I hired someone who had unicycled across the country, other times - the sword swallower (actually that worked great too) do you sense a circus theme here.