

Feature

The Mary Mazzio Interview:

Documentary Filmmaking & Entrepreneurship



Mary Mazzio is an award-winning filmmaker, Olympic rower, and former law firm partner with Brown Rudnick. She received her undergraduate degree from Mount Holyoke College, a law degree from Georgetown University, and studied film production at Boston University. Her company, 50 Eggs, LLC, has produced five independent films shown across the U.S. We met with Ms. Mazzio outside of Boston, Massachusetts, to explore her thoughts on entrepreneurship and the challenges and excitement of making documentaries.

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Kaizen: You've been a lawyer, an Olympic rower, and now a documentary filmmaker. When you were young, did you have any idea your adult life would be so varied?

Mazzio: Not at all. Although as a kid I remember always having a sort of boundless enthusiasm for whatever it was that I was doing. So I always thought that good things would happen in the end but I had no idea.

Kaizen: Where did you attend college?

Mazzio: I went to Mount Holyoke College, which is in western Massachusetts.

Kaizen: How did you choose that college?

Mazzio: I have to say that I originally went kicking and screaming because it was a women's college. 'What?' I said to my mother. She said, 'I really think you should consider it because you have leadership ability' or some such thing. I didn't know what that meant, and I said, 'I don't know if I want to go.' And she said, 'Are you kidding me? It's a

Seven Sisters school, and they have made it possible for you to go to a really good school.'

So I went out there really dragging my heels and I loved it! I thrived in such a way and I learned things that you can only learn at a women's college. And so for me it was empowering. It made me who I am today. And I feel very indebted to the college because of that.

Kaizen: In what ways was a women's college especially valuable to you?

Mazzio: I think now, in fact more than ever, young women, if they have an opportunity to spend two years, four years—whether it's an all girl's high school, a women's college—I think it's indispensable in terms of learning what you're capable of and hearing your own voice. When you go to a coed high school, as I did (there were five hundred kids in my class), you don't realize you have it, but there is implicit pressure in terms of 'Oh, I can't look too smart. Oh, if I take advanced calculus I'm a geek.' If you go to Mount Holyoke, all the voices around you are those of women. Everything around you—

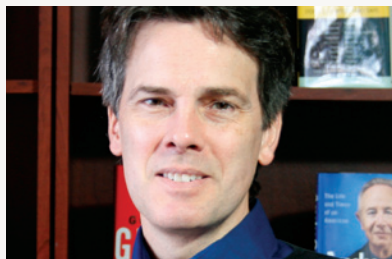
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From the Executive Director



Women start over half of all new businesses in the United States and, writes Sharon Hadary in *The Wall Street Journal*, “more than a quarter of a million women in the U.S. own and lead businesses with annual revenue topping \$1 million—and many of these businesses are multimillion-dollar enterprises. Clearly, many women have the vision, capacity and perseverance to build thriving companies.”

Our feature interview is with entrepreneur **Mary Mazzio**—documentary filmmaker, Olympian, and a former law partner (and a philosophy major as an undergraduate!).

I first learned about Mazzio from watching *Ten9Eight*, a 2009 documentary on a national business plan competition for teenagers from high-risk neighborhoods and low-income families. I highly recommend *Ten9Eight* for those interested in youth education, the highs and lows of entrepreneurship, and escape routes from poverty.

In this issue we also report on guest lectures by **Professor Douglas Rasmussen**, who visited us from St. John’s University in New York, and the excellent work of three students in the Philosophical Foundations of Education course—**Rebecca Logan**, **Joshua Branch**, and **Jaime Binning**.

At the Center, we also continue to build up our collection of resources on entrepreneurship and business ethics, so please feel welcome to visit us on the second floor of Burpee—or online at www.EthicsandEntrepreneurship.org.

Stephen Hicks, Ph.D.

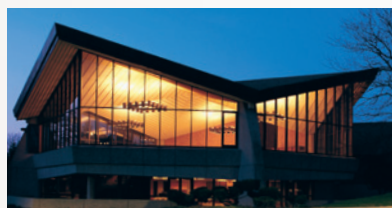
Guest Speaker



Douglas B. Rasmussen

Douglas B. Rasmussen, Ph.D., is professor of philosophy at St. John’s University in New York. Dr. Rasmussen is co-author (with Douglas J. Den Uyl) of *Norms of Liberty: A Perfectionist Basis for Non-Perfectionist Politics* (2005). Dr. Rasmussen gave two talks: the first on Aristotle’s ethics and the second on Philippa Foot’s ethical theory of natural goodness. Two short interviews with him are available at our website.

More information about CEE and Rockford College



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Princeton Review, Rockford College is also among 76 U.S. colleges and universities selected by the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching for inclusion in a “Community Engagement” college classification. Rockford College is one of 11 colleges in Illinois and 280 in the country with a Phi Beta Kappa chapter, the oldest and most prestigious academic honors society, and in 2007 was named a “College of Distinction.” Please visit us online at www.Rockford.edu.

MAZZIO, CONTINUED

you see women role models. And you see people stop wearing makeup. Everyone walks around in sweats. You’re free to be who you really are without the bullshit, without the trappings. For me that was so freeing.

It was such a stark contrast when I went to Georgetown Law School. I walked into my law school class thinking it’s going to be just like Mount Holyoke. And (this is like fifty percent women in my class) the number of women being called on, the number of women raising their hands, was next to nothing. I remember being in a class where the professor referred to men as ‘Mr. Hicks.’ And they referred to the women as ‘Hey you.’ So that was really eye opening.

And then to go into law (I was a lawyer early on in my career) which was largely a male domain and today it’s still the domain of a single wage earner because of the long intense hours (at least at big law firms). And I found I was able to navigate those waters because I had a heightened sense of awareness of the limitations that had been imposed on women. I could start to figure out ways to navigate the system and, I would say, in an enlightened and informed way as opposed to a clueless way.

Kaizen: Plus you also had the confidence that came from being in an environment that enabled you to be who you were and to develop those skills.

Mazzio: Right. Exactly. And being an athlete. That second piece of confidence was equally as critical. You know, when the chips are down and you make it through a race, I think that gives you a sort of innate confidence. And then when you are an athlete, where I was able to achieve a decent caliber, then when you’re in the world of men, you can fit in better: ‘Okay, she can spit, she can swear, we get her.’

Kaizen: Going back to your undergraduate years, you were involved in athletics then. Which sports?

Mazzio: Yeah, but I was bad. I was in rowing.

Kaizen: Was that something you started at Mount Holyoke?

Mazzio: I did. I was cut from almost every team in high school, so I was not known as an athlete. I wanted to be an athlete because I knew I had something inside. I had no eye/hand coordination, so I was the last one picked for teams.

So when I went to college, this man at Mount Holyoke came up to me and said, 'You're tall and you've got big legs.' And I'm like, 'Yeah? So?' And he said, 'I'm the rowing coach. Can you come down to the river tomorrow?' So I show up with a hundred and fifty other women. Right, like there's only four hundred in my class. One hundred and fifty freshman women show up and he has us do a fitness run. And I was toast. I'm so last it's ridiculous. I'll never forget that he said, 'We don't think we need you.' And I said, 'Let me come just one more day. Please let me try.' And I stuck with it. And because most of the people trying out hated getting up at 6 a.m. for practice, almost everyone quit, and I became an athlete out of default.

Then once I actually started to train it was clear that I had some natural strength and natural ability even though it wasn't eye/hand. You know, it was a perfect sport for me. But I was on very thin ice when I first started.

Kaizen: What led you to choose philosophy and political science as your majors?

Mazzio: Philosophy because I was getting such good grades. And I thought that if I were just a philosophy major that would be a challenging degree, so I added politics.

Kaizen: At this point what did you think your career path would likely be?

Mazzio: I had no clue.

Kaizen: How did you choose Georgetown as a law school?

Mazzio: They chose me. I remember struggling between the University of Chicago, where I had gotten in by the skin of my teeth, and I was choosing between Chicago and Georgetown. Again, I was putting myself through law school. I called up the Dean of Admissions and I said, 'Can I get a bigger package?' And



Ms. Mazzio (right) with members of the women's rowing Olympic Team, 1991

I started negotiating with both schools to get a big scholarship package. That being said, it was a very difficult decision. But I also thought, 'In Chicago I'm not going to be able to row. I still want to row. I still want to do it.' So I off I went to D.C.

Kaizen: After receiving your law degree, you worked for the Boston-based law firm Brown Rudnick. At what point did you have the talent and the seriousness enough to set the Olympics as an aspiration?

Mazzio: I don't know that I ever had the talent.

Kaizen: Surely you did.

Mazzio: Yes, but there were women, certainly physiologically, who were six-two, one hundred eighty-five pounds. These

women were chiseled from the gods.

These are the women I was competing against. I knew that I had a shot, but I was constantly being cut from the national team.

So I went through a very difficult decision tree. I was a lawyer. But I wasn't a great lawyer because I was spending this time training. I was a good rower. But I wasn't a great rower, right? So I said, 'I'm going to quit the sport because I'm not great at either.'

I had an encounter with a woman who was in my first film. She sat me down after I got cut and I said, 'This is it.' And she said, 'What are you talking about?' She said, 'You're unbelievably talented as an athlete.' I said, 'Do you really think so?' I really was not sure because I had these fits of brilliance and then plenty of mediocrity. And she said—and this is something

that had a profound effect on my life—she said, 'You make excuses when you lose. What is up with that?' And I was like, 'What? Oh my god. You're right. I make excuses all the time.'

You hear kids do it: 'We got wronged! The ref was jacking us!' And that is exactly how we're all brought up. Of course I didn't lose because of my own mistakes. I lost because the water was rough. Or because my competitor—she's eight hundred pounds.

Chris said, 'You make excuses all the time.' And I was like, 'You're right, I do. I make excuses all the time. I can't do that anymore. You can't really succeed if you do that.' I remember looking at her and saying 'You're absolutely right.'

Kaizen: And what's her name?

Mazzio: Chris Ernst. She had been a two-time Olympian. From that day on I completely changed how I approach things, and slowly developed a singularity of focus. I went to a sports psychologist because I was a very distractible person. Somebody would walk by my office and I'd always look up: 'Cookies? Who's got pizza?' So that really changed my life.

Kaizen: This is 1991? Leading up to the Olympics in Barcelona.

Mazzio: Exactly. Stopped going to parties. Stopped drinking with the men. Started eating right. I started working with an East German coach. He said, 'You're such a fighter but you have such a crappy aerobic base. How did this happen? Here's what you need to do. You're going to have bungee cords around your boat. You're going to be out on the water X times a day.' And I said, 'I'm ready. I'm going to do this.'

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Student Essay Contest Winners

Students in the *Philosophical Foundations of Education* course wrote an essay on entrepreneurship in education around the world. Using James Tooley's *The Beautiful Tree: A personal journey into how the world's poorest people are educating themselves*, students reflected upon the many experiments in education under often adverse circumstances. The essays were judged on their depth of interpretation as well as their independence of thought. Cash prizes were awarded for first place and two honorable mentions. Congratulations to our winners!

First Prize



Rebecca Logan

Honorable Mention



Jaime Binning

Honorable Mention



Joshua Branch

MAZZIO, CONTINUED

So I went from being ranked like thirteenth in the country, to like third or fourth. And they take seven scullers to the Olympics.

Kaizen: What was the Olympic experience like?

Mazzio: Really hard. Really stressful. Incredibly rewarding for a kid who was never perceived to be an athlete. That I've got that—my little Olympic sticker, and my little Olympic bag, tucked away in my closet. That says I really was an athlete. But honestly, making the Olympic team, that's not what really mattered. What really mattered was that I learned how to focus and concentrate. And that has just made me a better person.

Kaizen: After the Olympics, you went back to law practice, after your sabbatical so to speak? Did you then have ambitions toward doing documentary film?

Mazzio: No.

Kaizen: Not yet?

Mazzio: I had ambitions to not do a desk job. I had ambitions to, it sounds so cliché, but to change the world in ways I thought I could have an impact. And I looked out there and I'd go to the movies and watch television and I'd see women in media, and I didn't know anybody like those women. I'd see tall, leggy, gor-

geous blondes. I didn't see women who were opinionated and obnoxious. I didn't see women that were funny, you know? I was seeing a two-dimensional picture of women. I had gone to Mount Holyoke so I was sensitized to all this. And I said, 'I'm going to have a baby daughter. I've got to do something.' And I didn't know what that would be.

Kaizen: This is a drastic change, though, going from law school to film school.

Mazzio: Well no, because I went to film school on the sly. Nobody knew. And my husband was so great. When I was going to quit my job and go full time to film school, he said, 'You're X years away from being a partner at this law firm.' And I'm like, 'That's forever! I just want to go to film school full-time,' which really would have been foolish. That's my personality type. And I'm so glad that I listened to him because in fact I did become a partner. When you become a partner, people just assume (a) you didn't washout and (b) you weren't asked to leave so you must be a decent lawyer. In fact, my first investors in my first film, *A Hero for Daisy*, were either clients or friends of clients. It gave me an opportunity, again, to build another network, to help support my goals and my objectives. And that's what really made it possible. So instead, I went to film school part-time.

Kaizen: In your film school experience,

looking back, what was valuable or useful there?

Mazzio: I'd say understanding the medium. What film school will not do is teach you how to tell a story. Film school will not teach you how to seek access to capital. Film school will not teach you how to be entrepreneurial. You have to be all three of those things as a filmmaker.

But it taught me that I could really be comfortable around the jargon. Around the camera. What is color temperature? How do you balance for color temperature? What are the issues that go into the actual craft? So I found that particularly valuable.

Kaizen: What's the theme of your first film, *A Hero for Daisy*, and its focus on the Chris Ernst story?

Mazzio: It was really about Chris Ernst and these really remarkable women from Yale University in the 1970s. Yale had gone coed in the early 1970s; and like many other male universities converting, Yale was completely unprepared for women. So the concept of a rowing team. You put the women on a bus and you say, 'Okay, you can row, you can use the equipment but we don't have any facilities for you. You're going to wait on an unheated bus after you have trained in the rain or the snow. Every man is going to shower and then you're going to go back to campus. Twenty minutes back to campus. And, by the way, you're not allowed to use the shower, because it's a men's shower. Even after the men have showered you can't use the shower because, oh, the men will be late getting to dinner.'

So these women were getting sick, getting pneumonia, and two of them were about to go on to the 1976 Olympic Games. The men were losing all their races. It could not have been more of a stark comparison. These women tried diplomatically for a couple of years to rectify the situation. But the wheels of change were grinding slowly at Yale. So they decided, 'You know, people need to understand what we're going through.'

So nineteen members—only one person didn't participate—they went down to the Athletic Director's Office. And the

Athletic Director went, 'Oh, my god! Nineteen women.' They dropped trou and they had Title IX in blue marker on their chests and backs. Naked. And Chris Ernst read this statement which began with, 'These are the bodies which Yale is exploiting on a day like today.' There was a stringer for *The New York Times*.

That story, it was in 1976, went around the planet. It was in *The Paris Tribune*, and Yale alumni started writing in: 'Get those women a shower! Get clothes back on those women!' Several weeks later the women had their showers.

So Chris told me this story, she was the captain at Yale. She was the ringleader. And she was a good friend of mine. I laughed, 'You what?!' Then I said to myself, 'I'm an elite rower. I went to a women's college. I was about ten or whatever at the time when this happened. How did I miss this piece of history?' And her story wouldn't leave me. And I was like, 'I've got to tell this story.'

Kaizen: What year was that?

Mazzio: We finished the film in 1999 and it really came out in 2000. And that's when *The New York Times* was writing about it. NPR, you know all the media.

Kaizen: Who's your right-hand person on this?

Mazzio: My right-hand people at that time were my sister, Teresa Mazzio—I leaned on her a lot—she was working at Fidelity Investments—and my good friend Eric Hamilton. He had been a rower, and he was producing films, he was working with Bud Greenspan on documentaries. I really leaned on them both.

Kaizen: What did you do to get attention for the film?

Mazzio: Part of that was luck. Part of it is not being a jerk on the phone. Being super nice to people's secretaries. I mean secretaries and assistants make or break your career. People forget that.

But you were asking about publicity, that's where it begins and ends. You can make a great product, and if people don't know



Ms. Mazzio (right) directing Reba & Sarah Fisher in *Apple Pie*

about it, you're toast. And we didn't have money for a PR person. We had nothing. And so what really happened was this reporter from *The Boston Globe* wrote a story that was above the crease, above the New England Patriots in October. So everybody saw it. *The New York Times* called. Then it's NPR. And I'm speaking all over the country, it was a whirlwind. It was pretty incredible.

Kaizen: *Apple Pie* was your next film.

Mazzio: That was about athletes and their mothers. With *A Hero for Daisy* we had several broadcast opportunities because we had gotten so much press. We selected ESPN, and ESPN

did a marvelous job with it. So the guys at ESPN said, 'You know we've had great viewer feedback, so let's do another.' And they said, 'We'd love you to do something with celebrities.' I'm like, 'Celebrities?'

So I'm in the shower and I'm thinking, 'What can I do?' And then it came to me: 'Mothers! Perfect! I can have my women's theme. I can do my thing.' So I put together a film on famous athletes and their mothers. We had Shaquille O'Neal; we had Drew Bledsoe; we had Kenny Lofton who played baseball in six major World Series teams. We had Erik Weihenmayer, the first blind climber to summit Mount Everest; we had Rulon Gardner who had won the gold in the 2000 Olympics. I loved, loved, loved that film. I asked all of these athletes if they could have their moms do their sport. And to see Rulon Gardner show his mother how to do a take-down pin. And she's on the ground. So funny. It was a wonderful, wonderful project.

Kaizen: On the technical and production side of things, were things easier or smoother because it was your second film?

Mazzio: No, it was bad. We had a sponsor, and this taught me a very important lesson, which is: Do not start a project until you've got all the funding. We had a sponsor which had committed to underwriting a portion of the film but had to back out at the last minute because they had such a dismal year. And I didn't have a letter of intent—by the way I'm a former lawyer, right? My mistake was in not obtaining a letter of intent. So I learned a very valuable lesson with that.

But we got it done. I said, 'I've got a contract with the network. I have made commitments. By hook or by crook I'm going to make this happen.' I'll never forget we were staying in the crappiest hotels, eating day-old food for lunch, and it didn't matter. You know what, we got it done. Delivered on time for the network. The amount of press—I thought that we had struck it lucky for *A Hero for Daisy*. The amount of press that was generated for *Apple Pie* was *Entertainment Weekly*—it was probably twofold for what we had for *A Hero for Daisy*. That was really a wonderful experience.

Kaizen: Your two recent films deal directly with entrepreneurship—*Lemonade Stories* and *Ten9Eight*. What led you to focus on entrepreneurship?

Mazzio: Babson College had heard me on the radio and they had been approached about doing a series on PBS. They had called me up and said, 'Could you come in and maybe consult for us on this project?' And they said, 'We really love

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I met with Tom Bernard and he was intrigued by what was happening with the film. He and I had this ongoing discussion and I'm starting to get increasingly worried because we had an 85-minute film. I knew we could get down to 55 minutes for broadcast if we really had to, but I thought we'd lose some of the heart and soul of the film. And we'd have to cut out a whole bunch of kids. I figured if we're going to be up there at 85 minutes, let's try for a theatrical run.

So I called up a friend of mine for corporate sponsorship at Bain Capital, somebody there was on the board of Burger King. And then he said, 'You know, we work with AMC Entertainment. How about we put you in touch with the President?' So I had a conversation with Bob Lenahan, the President of Programming for AMC Theatres. It's just working the Rolodex. He said, 'Let me see this film, let me check it out. It's interesting you called because we have a new initiative that we are trying to launch here at AMC where we're trying to have more appropriate content for urban guests. And they complain to us how often African Americans and Latinas and Latinos and Hispanic people are depicted in the movies are cliché and offensive.' So I sent him the film.

He calls back a day later and said, 'All right, how are we going to make this happen? What do you need?' And I said 'How about you open free of charge to schools? And how about you run the trailer in every city we open?' AMC treated us like a blockbuster. All their theatres in Massachusetts had the trailer going. All their theatres in New York, Chicago, Miami, you name it. I mean, it was wild!

We also had a very special screening at the Smithsonian in D.C. and I called up the CEO Gerry Lopez and I said, 'Gerry, would you like to come out? I think there are going to be some Administration officials, you know a lot of VIPs, the chairman of Visa USA is going to be there; the Deputy Secretary of Commerce, Dennis Hightower, is going to speak.'

Kaizen: This led to your being invited to participate in the White House Seminar on Entrepreneurship?

Mazzio: Right, and by that time the press, including Tom Friedman [*New York*



Ms. Mazzio with entrepreneurs Rahfeal Gordon (left) and Russell Simmons (right) in 2009

Times] had written about the film.

Kaizen: The AMC Theatres run is over now. Is the documentary now available?

Mazzio: It is. www.50Eggs.com. You can also buy the DVD on PBS and Amazon.

Kaizen: Looking back over the years, what is the best thing for you personally about being an entrepreneur?

Mazzio: I have more time with my kids, because I drive the schedule. I mean there are times when I don't see my kids, but it's a choice now. You know, when I was a lawyer, you are busting your hump and you're working sixty, eighty, ninety hours a week and you're not seeing your kids. You're working for the man. And it's not a choice. And my kids will often remind me, 'Mommy you can come to my game—you're in town. You are your own boss, are you not?' They're really funny!

Kaizen: Excellent. So it's the control and flexibility that comes with the control?

Mazzio: Right. And more importantly, I feel like I'm doing what I'm supposed to be doing. If you have an opportunity to say something in a medium that can impact a human life—for me, what an impact.

And when we had free screenings for educators and kids, I got reports all day that kids were cheering, they were hooting and hollering, that they were clapping at the movie theatre. I was in New York and my heart was out of my mouth because I'm like, 'These are eighteen-year-old kids, a lot of them are at-risk kids. I'm a hockey mom with blue eyes—what the hell do I know? Can I connect with these kids?' I walked in the back of Lincoln Square AMC Theatres. You could hear a pin

drop. And I noticed kids were leaning forward.

Kaizen: The body language says it all.

Mazzio: Yes! And I'd say the proudest thing about *Ten9Eight* is when this woman calls me up, Winnie Jackson, she's working with at-risk adolescents, she told me, for forty-two years in LA. 'I took thirty kids to the Magic Johnson Theatre in Crenshaw to see your movie. You have no clue what you've done.' Please tell me, I want to know, I tell her. She said there wasn't an earbud, there wasn't any texting. She says, 'The conversation on the bus home with these young men was a conversation I have not heard in my forty years of work.' And I'm about to cry right now because I was like, 'Oh my God. If one of those kids stay in school, if one of those kids doesn't go back to prison, oh my God.' You know as a human to have that impact. I was just meant to be doing this kind of work.

Kaizen: About character. To do what you have done, you have to have all these skills and all this knowledge—but there are character issues about perseverance, and courage, and coming back from failure, and initiative. Can you pick any that have struck you as most significant character traits that make entrepreneurs successful?

Mazzio: Resilience. Honestly, coming back up from a failure. That is what it's all about. I think we live in a society where if you fail, most people stay down, but if you keep getting back up, something good will come out of it. It may not be your intended outcome, but something good will come out of it. So I think having courage, having the attitude that you're

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MAZZIO, CONTINUED

not going to take no for an answer. No is only No for that one minute. It doesn't mean it's No forever.

Kaizen: You mentioned the control and flexibility that being an entrepreneur gives you. But there can be challenges putting an entrepreneurial career together with family life. Any advice about how to combine them?

Mazzio: I struggle with it myself. You know, I have workaholic tendencies and it's bad. I'm the kind of person who can't relax on vacation. That's bad. I'm too revved up. But it's very difficult when you have your own business and you want to make it successful and make everybody around you successful.

But my children are very understanding. And I think they think it's really cool what I'm doing. Part of it's the medium. Right? But the other part is, 'Yeah, my mom owns her own company.' And they think that's kind of different and interesting. So they're proud of me. And that means a lot to me.

And my husband, he's so used to it now. You know, when you're an entrepreneur, you're oftentimes leaning on somebody really hard because you're making all the decisions, right? It's not like you're at your law firm where you have two hundred colleagues who are really, really smart and you can bounce ideas off of. I'm making the decisions and I have very wonderful advisors, but you can only use those advisors sparingly. So I lean on him a lot.

Kaizen: For young people just starting out, what is the most important piece of advice you'd give them?

Mazzio: I would say if you've got a passion, again, think strate-



Ms. Mazzio near Boston, Massachusetts in 2010

gically, you might want to go out on your own. But you might want to go and work for somebody.

If you want to be a filmmaker, go find a director, see if you can intern and be prepared to work 24/7, 365. Kill yourself because that work ethic will be impressive. And it will lead to something. You might not know what it's going to lead to, but if you kill yourself, you will stand apart.

When I was a lawyer, when we would hire young lawyers, I noticed that sometimes the brightest lawyers—it came to them so easily over the years that they didn't know how to work hard. And so I am a big fan of—if you're hungry and you're scrappy, and you'll work hard and you're trustworthy, then I want you.

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IN THE NEXT ISSUE:

**Eduardo Marty on
Entrepreneurship
in Argentina**

