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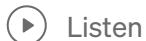
Terry Eaton of Eaton Fine Art: 5 Things I Wish Someone Told Me Before I Began Leading My Company



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Authenticity is always appreciated. We enjoy collaborating with both the designers as well as ownership groups directly to develop the narrative and



speaks to their vision. Our ultimate goal is curating innovative art programs that engage hotel guests and travelers around the world.

As part of our series called “5 Things I Wish Someone Told Me Before I Began Leading My Company”, I had the pleasure of interviewing Terry Eaton.

His eye for art cannot be matched. As the President and Chief Curator of Eaton Fine Art, he has been collaborating on art programs for international hotel brands for almost 30 years. After studying Business Administration with a background in Fine Art at The University of Texas at Austin, Terry merged his childhood love of art and his entrepreneurial spirit. He co-founded the Austin-based firm with his husband and business partner, Robert, that specializes in the curation of art programs for the hospitality industry.

To stay on top of the latest art trends, Terry and his team have traveled to museums and locally significant locations, while also scouting talented artists and artworks at internationally acclaimed art shows. Eaton Fine Art prides itself on establishing creative collaborations, understanding the immense value of branding and marketing, and delivering tailored, innovative, and bespoke art programs that enhance each property’s unique narrative. The firm has collaborated on the art programs for dozens of high-profile clients and brands across the nation, including Marriott International, Related Companies, Four Seasons Hotels & Resorts, Host Hotels & Resorts and HRI Properties. Eaton Fine Art was a Starwood approved vendor for over 24 years and is currently a specified vendor for Marriott brands including Four Points by Sheraton, Aloft Hotel, and Elements for the guest rooms and public spaces. Eaton Fine Art is also a Hilton Hotels & Resorts-approved art source and curates art programs for numerous Hyatt Hotels brands as well as numerous hotel ownership groups and independent brands.

Thank you so much for joining us in this interview series! Before we dive in, our readers would love to “get to know you” a bit better. Can you tell us a bit about your ‘backstory’ and how you got started?

For nearly 30 years, I’ve collaborated on curating art programs for international hotel brands and clients in hospitality. I’ve been fortunate enough to bring together my childhood love of art with my passion for travel and hotel stays.

My husband, Robert, and I started the company after carefully researching the hotel industry and discovering a void in art curation for hotels, and so Eaton Fine Art was born in 1992. Our full-service art consulting firm specializes in creative project design, publishing, and custom framing for the hospitality properties around the world.

We regularly attend international art shows to scout talented artists and artworks to then integrate them into our collaborations while also focusing on sustainable, locally sourced art. We pride ourselves on being everything to our collaborators while understanding the immense value of branding and marketing. We deliver tailored, innovative, and bespoke art programs that amplify each property’s unique narrative.

We believe that art is the critical element that brings the final touches to a great hotel design. It’s the icing on the cake or the “wow” factor to an already fantastic architectural and interiors palette.

What was the “Aha Moment” that led to the idea for your current company? Can you share that story with us?

I’ve always had a love for art and all sorts of creative mediums. When I was a teenager, I sold my own art at the Starving Artist Art Fair on the Riverwalk in San Antonio; I even had my own business cards as a freelance artist. Looking back, I like to think of this experience as one of those moments when my life comes full circle.

Today, instead of selling my own art, myself and our team of art curators collaborate with artists around the world. Our team at Eaton Fine Art epitomizes the old cliché that if you love what you do, then it really isn’t work. We are very passionate about curating art programs that bring a smile to those who are using the space.

Can you tell us a story about the hard times that you faced when you first started your journey? Did you ever consider giving up? Where did you get the drive to continue even though things were so hard?

Like many small businesses just starting out, we faced challenges with cash flow. Robert and I put our personal money into the company until we established a solid cash flow to ensure Eaton Fine Art would move forward.

Despite challenges that arose in the beginning, I never considered giving up; it's just not part of my nature. I've always believed that the value of hard work pays off, even through the most challenging times.

I've developed the drive to keep pushing forward based on the popular phrase: 'When the going gets tough, the tough get going.' At Eaton Fine Art, we work hard all the time so when the times are hard, we work even harder. We're blessed to have an amazing group of hard working team members who are passionate about what we do and long-lasting relationships with our clients who we have collaborated with for decades.

So, how are things going today? How did your grit and resilience lead to your eventual success?

Despite these challenging and uncertain times, we continue to push forward and find new opportunities. At the moment, we're collaborating with many of our long-term clients while working with some new clients as well. Our current projects range from boutique restaurants to grand hotels with more than 1,000 guest rooms. We faced challenges in 2020 and worked together with collaborative spirits and creative innovation.

What do you think makes your company stand out? Can you share a story?

What makes Eaton Fine Art stand out is our collaborative culture at the company. I'm a creative, collaborative, and compassionate person, and I wanted to instill my personal values into the company's culture. Before Eaton Fine Art, I worked for other small businesses. For my own business, I wanted to create a culture in which I too would want to thrive and grow in. From the very beginning, I've taken steps to build a culture that is highly inclusive and collaborative. We are all here for the advancement of our clients and projects.

We allow our employees to shine and support them to do great work on their projects. We believe in building and fostering the creativity of each person at our company, regardless of whether they work on the accounting side, the production side, or the creative side of the business. Ultimately, everything leads back to our cultural ethos of collaboration, caring for the work we produce and ensuring the end result is pleasing to our clients and the guests within the spaces.

It's also worth noting that Eaton Fine Art is certified as a LGBT Business Enterprise (LGBTBE®) by the National LGBT Chamber of Commerce, the national voice of the LGBTQIA+ business community. The National LGBT Chamber of Commerce represents LGBTQIA+ business owners who have generated over \$1.7 trillion in economic impact, create jobs and innovate business solutions nationwide. We're very proud to be affiliated with this global community. We take pride in creating an inclusive and diverse environment for our employees.

Can you share a story about the funniest mistake you made when you were first starting? Can you tell us what lessons or 'takeaways' you learned from that?

When we first started, Eaton Fine Art was commissioned with curating artwork for a hotel in downtown Denver. At the time, one of our collaborators — the owner of the firm spearheading the interior design of the hotel — raised concerns. He thought a completed 8-foot by 10-foot painting did not represent the hotel's interior narrative. The next day, I traveled from San Francisco to Denver and met with the owner of the design firm along with the hotel's general manager to discuss the matter. I listened to their concerns and explained the artist's intent for the painting and how it complemented the hotel's overarching design. The general manager understood the creative choices and loved it! The design firm owner came around and agreed, as well, with the artist making a few minor adjustments. All were thrilled with the final commissioned painting.

From that instance and moving forward, I've learned that it's important to listen to any grievances that arise from your clients and then understand how to resolve them. It's important to come up with a solution quickly and work with your collaborators to ensure it gets fixed.

Often leaders are asked to share the best advice they received. But let's reverse the question. Can you share a story about advice you've received that you now wish you never followed?

When we first started the business, I received some negative responses, naysaying, and bad advice. These included: "Don't start your own business. It's too hard. There are too many challenges."

I avoided the negatives and looked for the positives in starting a business, and I'm grateful for following this approach. Despite the many challenges of not only starting a business, but moving forward during uncertain times, we've ensured that Eaton Fine Art continues to thrive. When I'm truly passionate about something, I will make it happen.

You are a successful business leader. Which three character traits do you think were most instrumental to your success? Can you please share a story or example for each?

1. **Pour Your Heart and Soul into Your Passion:** Everyone needs a way to express themselves through a creative outlet such as cooking, fiction writing, graphic arts, etc. Growing up, I was highly creative, and my mother was highly supportive of my endeavors. She also encouraged my father to support me as well. They were my biggest supporters and cheerleaders as I pursued piano classes and painting lessons. I reached for what made me smile and for things that fed my creative soul. To this day, I remember that lesson and always embrace and support others in their creative goals and desires.
2. **Being Present:** I listen and support our team members, clients, collaborators, friends, and family just by being present. We must really make the time and effort to listen to each other and learn how to help support one another. There are so many distractions in today's world, but if we all take a moment to slow down and pay attention to the person or task in front of us, we can accomplish great things. Throughout my career as President and Chief Curator of Eaton Fine Art, I've made myself present to my clients and collaborators so I fully understand their objectives. Most recently, we collaborated with California-based architectural firm WATG and its interior design studio, Wimberly Interiors, for the Park Hyatt Aviara Resort, Golf Club & Spa in Carlsbad, California. We worked closely with the design

team and I made myself present to ensure that every element of the art program celebrated this estate-style resort.

3. **Tenacity:** I earned the nickname “Tenacious Terry” growing up. Once I put my mind to something, I move full steam ahead. Tenacity involves pursuing a goal with persistence and determination, and over the years, I’ve worked hard to accomplish my goals for our company. My advice for up-and-coming entrepreneurs is to surround yourself with people who know more than you in various fields. For example, I’m not as technologically savvy, but we collaborate with a great IT firm that ensures everything goes smoothly. Our Eaton Fine Art staff includes team members who are highly proficient in not only curating art collections but also implementing and delivering all orders. This proved to be an invaluable trait for the art curation of the Park Hyatt Aviara Resort, which was scheduled to open last year amid the pandemic. Our team crafted solutions that ensured the delivery of the art pieces was timely and followed proper safety measures. We collaborated closely with the selected artists and artisans to ensure safe delivery for the shipment of art materials and supplies for the public spaces — prior to the anticipated opening date. They demonstrated tenacity to ensure that we met our client’s objectives.

Which tips would you recommend to your colleagues in your industry to help them to thrive and not “burn out”?

During times of uncertainty, it’s very important to create moments for yourself on a daily basis. Everyday, Robert and I go on an afternoon walk with our cocker spaniels. Our daily routine forces us to step away from work and the endless news cycle and treasure the most important things in our lives — each other and our fur babies. We’re grateful for our neighborhood in Austin; everyday we walk around and wave to our fellow neighbors (from six feet away) to escape all the craziness for just a few minutes. It is easy to get bogged down with all that is going on but, it is important to remember that it is OK to step away from all the craziness for a few moments.

It’s also important to keep in touch with family, friends, and colleagues. I stay connected with a close group of friends and we help each other laugh. Laughter truly is the best medicine for the soul. A good laugh helps bring your mind and body back into balance. And nothing brings me more happiness than bringing a smile to someone’s face. During the beginning of the pandemic, our team collaborated with Phil Stein,

Founder of PS Design Collective, to offer a floral arranging happy hour called “Flowers & Prosecco” via Zoom conferencing for our clients in New York City. One of our team members delivered fresh flowers and a bottle of prosecco via motorcycle and no-contact delivery as she leaves them on door steps. I enjoy creating floral arrangements, and he thought it would be a great way to bring smiles by showing them how to make their own arrangements. It was a great way to stay connected with our clients while making them smile.

What are the most common mistakes you have seen CEOs & founders make when they start a business? What can be done to avoid those errors?

My advice to up-and-coming entrepreneurs is don't try to do everything. Working too hard will eventually lead to burnout. Instead, surround yourself with a team who is highly collaborative, committed, and skilled in different areas. Through challenging times, supporting each other is critical.

In your experience, which aspect of running a company tends to be most underestimated? Can you explain or give an example?

One of the most underrated values is listening. Good listening skills allow business leaders and entrepreneurs the ability to truly understand what another person is communicating while increasing productivity. The ability to listen carefully allows us to fully understand the design intent of a hotel project and then immerse ourselves in this unified vision. If we all take a moment to pay attention to the person in front of us and maintain an open mind, we can accomplish great things.

Ok super. Here is the main question of our interview. What are your “5 Things I Wish Someone Told Me Before I Began Leading My Company”? Please share a story or an example for each.

1) As an entrepreneur, I believe that finding great team members is pivotal to the long-term growth of your company. Make sure you follow your gut when finding new employees who are committed to the company's passion. Our talented and creative team exemplifies what a client many years ago said about Eaton Fine Art: ‘You are one of the most innovative art groups in the country.’

2) When it comes to managing client expectations, deliver on your promises and go above and beyond their expectations. By meeting their objectives, we've developed a solid reputation in the hospitality industry and collaborated on the art programs for dozens of high-profile clients and brands, including Marriott International, Related Companies, Four Seasons Hotels & Resorts, Host Hotels & Resorts and HRI Properties. Eaton Fine Art has been a Starwood-approved vendor for over 24 years, and we are currently the specified vendor for Marriott brands including Four Points by Sheraton, Aloft Hotel, and Element as well as collaborating on many other of Marriott's full-service and luxury brands. We also are a Hilton Hotels & Resorts-approved art source and we curate art programs for numerous Hyatt Hotels brands as well as numerous hotel ownership groups and independent brands.

3) Make sure you love what you do. If you pursue an entrepreneurial path, following your passion is the best way to create success. Eaton Fine Art was founded out of a love and passion for art and design within the hospitality industry. I always knew I would be an entrepreneur, so I did not go to art school, but rather to business school with an art background. My business partner, Robert, grew up in the hotel industry as his family owned a small hotel. We combined both of our passions as children into our passions and business focus as adults.

4) Collaborate with an open mind with clients and team members. We are stronger when we come together. We must remember that by coming together and supporting one another, we can make it through anything. At Eaton Fine Art, we are always collaborating with each other and our fellow friends and clients. We believe that having creative ideas come together makes for a strong vision and creative possibilities.

5) Authenticity is always appreciated. We enjoy collaborating with both the designers as well as ownership groups directly to develop the narrative and curate an art program, which evokes, enhances, and speaks to their vision. Our ultimate goal is curating innovative art programs that engage hotel guests and travelers around the world.

You are a person of great influence. If you could start a movement that would bring the most amount of good to the most amount of people, what would that be? You never know what your idea can trigger. :-)

I would start a movement on championing LGBTQIA+ causes, as they are very close to my heart. We strongly believe in the importance of giving back to our community. My husband, Robert, and I do all we can to help support local and national charities that are strong voices within the community.

When Eaton Fine Art received an LGBT Business Enterprise (LGBTBE®) certification by the National LGBT Chamber of Commerce, we used our business to also support initiatives and create a larger impact than if it was just the two of us. So many corporations nationally and internationally really value minority businesses and look to include them for their projects and diversity programs. Eaton Fine Art donated more than 25 pieces of artwork to AIDS Services of Austin's main campus, providing a more welcoming environment not only for the staff, but also their clients and the community.

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This was very inspiring. Thank you so much for the time you spent with this!

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