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RISE OF THE AUTODIDACTS

JOSEPH VILLANUEVA, CHIEF STRATEGY OFFICER AND CO-FOUNDER OF REPUBLICIST, EMBODIES A NEW GENERATION OF ENTREPRENEURS WHO ARE RESHAPING THE BUSINESS LANDSCAPE.

REPUBLICIST FOUNDER
JOSEPH VILLANUEVA

"SELF-EDUCATION
ALLOWS ONE
TO LIVE ABOVE
SOCIETY'S
ENCULTURATION"

Forbes USA Cover

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The Rise Of The Autodidactic Millennial As Today's Entrepreneur

Dec 30, 2022, 12:16pm EST

Rod Berger Contributor

Few would argue that education in any form is a vital element to the **success and growth** of every individual. Yet, for some, the traditional learning environments are less advantageous to their makeup and learning style. Educational models that allow students to take ownership in project-based or **problem-based learning** and engagement often enliven and challenge the educational experience.



Joseph Villanueva represents a new brand of professionals aiming to author their own future.

- JOSEPH VILLANUEVA

For aspiring entrepreneurs with can-do mindsets, many become restless under formal education methods. A wish for self-discovery and passion-based pursuits often drives them to learn and journey into a world of independent self-education. This self-taught phenomenon is known as **autodidacticism**, which is **motivated by self-determination** and enthusiasm for learning independently. Successful entrepreneurs such as Henry Ford, Steve Jobs, Bill Gates, and others fall into this category, and their narratives often influence the younger generations.

Joseph Villanueva, chief strategy officer and cofounder of **Republicist**, a high level consulting agency based in New York, is a self-described autodidactic. A college dropout and a lifelong self-learner, Joseph Villanueva has funneled his self-learning into becoming a public relations strategist in fashion, music, and technology.

Part of his learning is highlighted in teaching himself the legal system to successfully defend himself as a **whistleblower** to the concerning practices applied to clients by a former employer. Through that experience and the application of other self-taught methodologies, Villanueva, just 33 years old, has embraced a strong belief in the power of self-education and the power of conviction.

To gain insight into the younger generation's mindset and the world of self-learning, this reporter conversed about the life of the autodidactic with Villanueva. A firsthand look into a phenomenon on the rise can garner a snapshot of the minds of younger individuals pursuing entrepreneurial dreams and growing with personal conviction at the helm.

Unrestrained Education

Rod Berger: You have a well-publicized legal win through self-learning that appears to expose the backbone of your pursuits. How did defending yourself as an autodidactic shape your journey?

Joseph Villanueva: I learned how the legal system worked on my own and won one of the most important **federal court cases in our sector** without a law degree.

My business partner, Aleksandra Beliaeva, and I worked at an innovative talent-scouting network in Eastern Europe. While serving as an executive officer there, I became aware of injustices to some of the talents on their roster. A court case ensued and while I take pride in ultimately being vindicated, it was a taxing experience. It was important to me that I, personally, wasn't compensated for damages. It would have been a great dishonor to have been paid for being a whistleblower, even in victory.

Now, through the Republicist, I consult top media and technology executives, all with a self-taught education. I do not downplay a university education as being great for many, but my story is proof that there is another route for people who don't fit into the relatively inflexible structure of our current educational system.

Bertrand Russell **said**, "Men are born ignorant, not stupid, but they are made stupid by education." He has a point. For all its benefits, I have found that formal education can make one think they know a lot, with

confidence concentered by a top-of-the-class finish. However, beyond what's taught in school, there's a world of knowledge to uncover. Autodidactism, at its core, is the unyielding, lifelong pursuit of self.

Berger: Can you describe your issues with more traditional forms of education and how self-learning has opened your eyes and passions?

Villanueva: I'm in favor of dynamic educational systems like those developed by philosopher Rudolf Steiner, which emphasize connecting a student with "The Self" by aligning the senses with the intellect via eurythmy, meditation, and a system of empowering cultural myths. I feel they are imperative to advancing U.S. education into one scaled effort for a changing world.

There are education systems that exist that aim to develop autodidacts. However, they are largely private and ignored by the current infrastructure. I believe this must change; humans have innate abilities currently being lost to the malaise."

Passion for Self-Learning

Berger: You appear passionate in your make-up and drive. Can you describe where that comes from?

Villanueva: I have found that self-learning is a great way to discover one's passion and really focus on it. When you're self-taught, there are no restrictions, unnecessary guidelines, and rigid curriculums to create

borders around your learning. You can learn anything, and that amount of exposure is how you find what you want to learn about and become a master at it.

Self-learning also allows people to build a healthy attitude of questioning established theories and paradigms. History is full of cases where established scientific, cultural, and societal truths and perceptions have been challenged and overturned by new theories as we learn and discover new knowledge.

The change wouldn't be possible without an unbiased approach to learning, which our institutions often don't provide. A society's paradigms are taught inside institutions. Unfortunately, and in my opinion, they [formal education institutions] are more focused on indoctrinating students, not exposing them to any learning that might challenge their cherished paradigms. A liberated mind is always generative.

Self-education allows one to live above society's enculturation and see beyond the giant stage play of the media and governments to force a narrative. It's much easier for an autodidact to live above these engineered, emotionally charged attempts at manipulation. I have found the books *Quantum Psychology* by Robert Anton Wilson, *The End Of The World is Just the Beginning* by Peter Zeihan, and *Win Your Case* by Gerry Spence to be great material for grasping the ideas behind the autodidactic.

Future Reshaping

Berger: How has standing up for your convictions changed your professional path with clients?

Villanueva: An ethical power exercised by our efforts at the Republicist has led to our agency's success. The talents and brands we work with trust us not to swindle them. Before my time in public relations, I interfaced and lived with many idealists and creatives, autodidacts, and culture jammers. These are people to which the future belongs, unafraid to challenge the societal status quo.

To some, they wish to disrupt the current order of things and herald a world where progress, innovation, and creativity are hallmarks of society.

According to **Pew research**, a central question inside education is if formal and informal learning structures will benefit individuals trying to meet the changing needs of the future workplace. In some respects, AI and other advancements are removing certain human-performed jobs and indirectly asking society to increase knowledge and skills with critical thinking at the core.

The lifelong learner is now emphasized as a framework for a more enriching life and one that holds more job opportunities. Villanueva represents a younger generation searching for answers as they define their career paths and place in the world. To him, self-learning or autodidacticism encourages those who feel the restrictive elements of formal education to break free and embrace self-discovery on their own terms.

There are examples of **many in history** that have furthered their knowledge and education on their own. Today, there appears to be a growing set inside the younger generations following suit.

Interviews have been edited and condensed for clarity.

Business

Republicist Officer's Victory in Federal Court Establishes Platform for Whistleblowers in High Fashion

July 13, 2022 at 9:01 AM PDT

Joseph Villanueva, chief strategy officer and founder of high-consulting agency Republicist, successfully defended himself against a lawsuit filed by System Agency, the talent agency Villanueva formerly led and developed into Eastern Europe's most sophisticated talent-scouting network. Villanueva's victory comes at a time when high fashion is in dire need of new, ethical leaders.



New York, New York--(Newsfile Corp. - July 13, 2022) - A recent legal victory by an officer of a New York high consulting agency has acknowledged the need for ethical leadership in high fashion and affirmed whistleblowers' efforts to pursue it.

In September 2021, Joseph Villanueva, chief strategic officer of Republicist, LLC, successfully negotiated the dismissal of allegations of defamation and breach of fiduciary duty in a lawsuit totaling millions of dollars filed by his former employer, System Agency. The dismissal was a milestone that acknowledged the success of efforts by Villanueva that began in May 2019.

While Villanueva served as an executive officer of System Agency, he disclosed to certain stakeholders information pertaining to executive malfeasance and credible complaints of abuse of power and trust, including abuse involving minors, which were covered up and allowed to occur for years at the agency. In retaliation, System Agency and president Jeremie Roux not only terminated Villanueva's employment but also withheld earnings owed to the System Agency talent who informed Villanueva of the misconduct.

In its complaint filed in federal court in Manhattan in July 2019, System Agency alleged that it suffered harms as a result of Villanueva's departure:

* Three staff members terminated their contracts with System Agency, including the director of development.

* Four of System Agency's top models terminated their contracts, including the agency's highest earner.

* System Agency's top music artist terminated its contract.

System Agency further alleged that Villanueva's departure and disclosure caused the loss of joint-venture arrangements with three financial institutions, foreign investment socialites, a local growth-startup brand partnership, and a high-profile production label. Under Roux's direction, System Agency sued both Villanueva and Republicist, the public-relations and consulting firm he cofounded and launched after his departure.

Presiding over the dispute was Obama-appointed U.S. District Judge Jesse M. Furman, who on December 22, 2020, denied System Agency's motion for summary judgment, finding its representations "plainly untrue" and that it had "fail[ed] to submit any admissible evidence" to support its claims. Evidence found inadmissible included an "allegedly fraudulent Credit Suisse document sent by Villanueva to someone else," an "alleged Instagram post," and a "document, of unknown provenance, listing people to whom Villanueva allegedly sent defamatory email messages."

The court's ruling led to a swift decline in the litigation, resulting in Villanueva's successful negotiation during depositions that System Agency pay all earnings owed to talent.

In July 2021, System Agency eventually defaulted on its claims a day before trial. The agency also failed to defend a counterclaim by Villanueva for \$100,000 in unpaid commissions, citing a lack of resources and inability to bear the expense of a trial. As a result, the court dismissed System Agency's claims with prejudice and deemed the company to be in default as to Villanueva's counterclaim.

In September 2021, Republicist and its leadership decided not to pursue damages, asset seizures, and the unpaid commissions. "The counterclaim was symbolic," said Republicist cofounder and chief strategic officer Villanueva. "If we were to accept money for this victory, it would be a great dishonor. We were glad to be granted such a challenge."

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Jul. 13, 2022, 12:00 PM

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GOTHAM

Rebuilding Gotham: The High-Consulting Powerhouse

October 19, 2022

Joseph Villanueva lifted the artist-management industry with his highly publicized 2021 whistleblower victory in federal court. He has since co-founded the high-consulting firm Republicist to provide counsel with a high-ethical baseline to the most important emerging artists and brands in the genetics, robotics, fine-art, and luxury sectors.



Every New Yorker is created. How did you arrive in the city, and what early experiences in the city created you?

I arrived exactly 10 years ago with Hurricane Sandy. Truly. Two months prior to committing to move to New York from East Los Angeles, where I am from, I was approached by Comcast to film a reality TV show pilot focused on my moving to Manhattan and opening a talent agency with Ms. Olga Tavarez, an influential talent executive who was known for developing important actors and models at WME/IMG. Comcast's commitment to the pilot empowered us to organize a team of investors who believed in our business model, inclusive of the developing reality TV component. I admittedly had no intention of pursuing the series seriously and ceased the production immediately upon arriving in New York. Olga and I desired instead to establish a credible business.

Understandably, the investment team lost confidence in the project, which no longer had immediate commercial appeal, and within six months, we ceased operations. The dream of living in the rent-free apartment I was offered from our former investors faded soon thereafter, and I moved to the South Bronx, where I lived for two years.

I recall that the winter of 2013-2014 was historically very cold, and I did not have the financial means to travel for the holidays. My apartment had fallen victim to a bedbug infestation that was sweeping through the city. No matter how clean or toxic my roommates and I made the space, we couldn't resolve the challenge. With the roommates away one week, I found the moment opportune to open all the windows and allow winter to have its way with the apartment. I recall watching House of Cards that week, lips blue.

But the effort was successful, and we were released from the infestation. In retrospect, I suppose the lesson was that someone has to brave the cold.

I next found myself living at the infamous McKibbin Lofts, among a community of committed culture-jammers, upwardly mobile autodidactics, socialists, anarchists, photographers, stylists, hackers, and such. This was a period of great-generation for me and all the individuals who lived there during that important moment in New York history. Federal government surveillance was ever present, the FBI raided the community a handful of times in search of the Anonymous hacking group. A community of autodidactic millennial leaders manifested there and began to advent around 2015 to 2016. They are now leading industries, and I am proud to be one of them.

How do you envision New York in the year 2030?

The clever and creative will run New York in the post-Baby Boomer era; let's pin it at 2030.

Many white-collar professionals will find settlement working outside the city, making office space affordable.

The Boomer demographic will begin to flush the market with fair-priced real estate as they look to cash in on their lifelong investments with little patience.

Wealthy foreigners from the Eastern world will pivot out of New York real estate and sell their assets at fair prices due to asset-seizure potential during times of conflict, while other foreigners will sell their New York properties due to capital constraints during trialing times.

This will all be beneficial to young creative entrepreneurs, talented immigrants, and artists. New Yorkers will remove themselves from the left-right dichotomy by 2030, and the new system in the next world order will be developed in New York. The world should want it to be. Hearsay and bias aside, New York is the greatest city in the world.

How do you envision the United States and North America in 2030?

Domestically in the United States, Mexico, and Canada, we should expect nothing short of ascension and abundance so long as we can remove ourselves from the right- and left-wing separation. We will need to become “up-wing” instead.

In Mexico, I foresee an empowered and ever more skillful population. Mexico was unaffected by the post-World War II population rifts and bubbles that will challenge many of the important global markets in the coming age. Mexico is benefiting from the reallocation of medium-level production from China and will surely specialize in certain important developing markets, as Singapore and Taiwan have-in Mexico's case, I predict robotics. It must be known that Mexico is the United States' most important partner in the coming order. Both the U.S. and Mexico are each other's panacea.

Equally important is Canada's fertilizer industry, which accounts for nearly 15% of the global fertilizer market. This fertilizer will be taken off the international market and traded regionally to the benefit of all three. This regional-focused trading will also create severe agricultural-output challenges internationally.

How do you envision Europe in 2030?

So dark all over Europe...

How do you envision the global atmosphere in 2030?

I paint a somber global image, and I will take responsibility in detailing my reasons henceforth. At their core, most markets globally depend on the current world order-that is, the American-led globalized trade agreements initiated after World War II. The current order opened American consumer markets to the countries destroyed by World War II. Global trade has been secured by the U.S. Navy's presence, which enables products to be shipped routinely without expensive shipping insurance.

In return for access to American consumer markets, countries agreed to partake in the current order, which included agreeing to challenge the spread of communism. The American order prevailed after the fall of the Soviet Union, and the impossibly rare period of relative stability we consider normal commenced.

That period is now over. The U.S. is pulling back on its maritime assurances, while other regional powers such as India are realizing their maritime power for the first time. The food- and fertilizer-trade agreements, stable prices, and all the other comforts of our former normality are over.

Factually, most countries cannot support their own populations with food and are dependent on the current world order, and increasing food costs will result in Arab Spring-style instability internationally, for better or worse.

Also essential to note that the current world order is also built upon a capitalist framework, which depends on increasing consumption and revenue, which in turn typically depend on ever-growing populations. This model is not possible in the coming age for most developed countries. Capitalism ends when financial projections in most consumer markets are scaled to decrease by 30% to 45% in 20 years.

This fact is a global-order-changing event that will end capitalism as we know it. Governments will attempt to mitigate the challenge with some iteration of a planned economy.

New York is the most competitive market in the world. How would you describe your relationship with your competitors in a dramatically changing consulting market?

Our competitors publish media on their channels about building a more ethical and inclusive world, yet they empower America's adversaries and continue to work with serial abusers in all forms, while offering creative counsel to Big Pharma on how to feed New Yorkers more opioids. They are a status quo incarnate, operating within a reality tunnel of a previous cycle. Their time is over.

Every consulting firm and consumer base industry needs to acknowledge the advent of the millennial demographic. Not every country has one, but the U.S. does, and millennials have been challenged twice, first in 2008 during the financial crisis and then again by Covid once they regained footing. This financial frustration is manifested at a minimum as consumer activism. We've seen millennials and Gen Z turn their purchasing power into a war chest for activism in the best ways since 2020. Our competitors lack the ethical merit to manage these challenges and are increasingly unable to align their businesses with this new cast of principled innovators, whom Republicist is committed to empowering.

Which three career moments do you draw from the most as a consultant?

1. Representing myself in federal court without a law degree undoubtedly built a foundation for resolve.
2. I was entrusted as a manager of public relations for Princess Salwa Agha Khan during the sensitive transitional period that came with marriage, a name change, and a new title. In this role, I learned how to transition persons into new reality tunnels.

3. Leading and succeeding in the re-establishing, re-branding, and name change of Star Sysytem to SYSTEM agency. The agency needed to differentiate itself with new branding in nine countries and my success in that objective established me as a person of action in our sector.

When does one cease from being a New Yorker?

When you live here and stop learning, and then stop fighting.

Follow Republicist official Instagram: @Republicist



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