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5 Reasons Why Everyone Needs To Be An Entrepreneur

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The New Age of Enlightenment

With the rapid technological advancements in the past decade, the ability for individuals and organizations to imagine, create and produce viable products and services has never been cheaper, easier or of higher quality. Entrepreneurship fits extremely well as a mechanism engaging the various tools and concepts essential to navigate our new social morphism. We should consider this as the new Age of Enlightenment as our capacity to rapidly learn and execute gives us more opportunities to build our skills, form our own destinies and increase our financial independence. As was the original Age of Enlightenment in the 17th and 18th Centuries starting in Europe, long standing traditions were questioned and debated in favor of reason and individual self-determination.

This new intellectual freedom spread to urban centers across the continent, notably England, Scotland, Germany, the Netherlands, Poland, Russia, Italy, Austria, and Spain. The Enlightenment made its way across the Atlantic where it influenced Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson, among many, and played a major role in the American Revolution. The political ideals of the Enlightenment were captured in the American Declaration of Independence, the Bill of Rights, and the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen among several national movements.

Today, with these new ground-breaking technologies, the changing economic landscape and the growing absence of social safety nets, the time for a second Age of Enlightenment is well on its way. We just need to put the puzzle pieces together so that more people can recognize the opportunities, connect the dots and take charge of their future!

It's Time to Update the Definition of Entrepreneurship

There has never been a more proper period to seize the definition of entrepreneurship and interpret it with more relevance for our present economic times. The problem with its current definition is its limiting paradigm that forces most people and institutions to view it with restrictive blinders. In its traditional definition, the word, “entrepreneur” has been confined to Merriam-Webster’s meaning of “one who assumes the risk and management of business . . .” It has also meant the practice of running a business, big or small, and not necessarily in the context of having been the starter or the risk-taker but simply of running its “undertakings.”

Two Harvard economists, Josef Schumpeter and Arthur Cole, in the mid-20th Century, associated entrepreneurship with innovations that required “purposeful activities” and the need to create an organization in order to move the innovation forward. Peter Drucker widened the definition by calling it a “discipline” and like any discipline, could be learned and extended to all kinds of organizations. The *Encyclopedia of Entrepreneurship* (1982) goes further in stating that organizations and individuals have the potential of being entrepreneurial by a disciplined set of activities including:

- Taking the initiative
- Obtaining resources
- Committing to autonomous responsibilities
- Calculating risks in order to weigh the options and
- Launching their business, emotionally ready or not (most won't be)

Who Are the Real Entrepreneurs?

However, not all who start businesses can be considered “entrepreneurs.” Too often, new businesses fail because their owners do not make the commitments to build a successful business - and in a more extensive definition of entrepreneurship: to build successful project, a department or a movement.

Entrepreneurship is about a lifestyle; a commitment to life-long excellence in specific things you do by seeking *and* focusing on the answers, resources and feedback while developing a gritty mindset that gradually seeks out this procession of experiences as critical elements in building repetitious success.

Because it is hard, time consuming and mentally taxing, few are willing to make the dedication and instead, take shortcuts hoping for the best. Entrepreneurs, on the other hand, realize that nothing short of consistent training to build tenacity, focus and willpower are mandatory. As Anders Ericsson, the eminent psychologist - considered to be the father of the Science of Expertise - would say: Successful entrepreneurs are practitioners of “Deliberate Practice,” the five-step method for creating world class expertise. (Please refer to Malcolm Gladwell’s bestseller, *Outliers*.)

What all this research has revealed is that anyone has the potential to gain world class expertise. At first, there are the difficulties of acclimating to the rigors of Deliberate Practice but as with anything worth achieving, the toughest part is switching off the old mindset and gradually blending in a new, more dynamic mindset. You might call it your own Age of Enlightenment.

So how long does this take? Based on the research, it takes 20 hours to understand the methods and gain basic successes. (Refer to Josh Kaufman’s *The First 20 Hours*.) Once understood, the journey for world class performance is attained in 10,000 hours or a minimum of seven years and more likely ten years. At the start, it will always feel like an eternal distance but once well under way, the journey gains small, noticeable successes that enrich and reward your commitment. Dare I say that your thinking gains the tenaciousness to view challenges as a routine component of your growth. While the challenge may not get any easier, your mental capacity for it will. Once your Deliberate Practice is established, you will have elevated your standards, not just once but continuously because your mindset for defining excellence will automatically recalibrate itself to the next level up.

Now Is the Most Important Time to Be an Entrepreneur

Today, we are facing a rapid social upheaval where business as usual is unlike any “business as usual” we’ve known. At no time in history has our social order been tossed so topsy-turvy by the thoughts and deeds of entrepreneurs. Its home cooking versus speedy gourmet deliveries; machine assistants versus human assistants, brick and mortar versus online, STEM versus creative originality; youthful freshness versus senior wisdom, and perhaps, the most impactful to our personal futures: the lingering concepts of work versus the realities of today’s workplace. The battle lines are drawn across the playing field and the metrics are now drawn in 3D. Complex, concise and convoluted; that is, until we learn and train to maneuver and maybe even succeed beyond anything we’ve accomplished before!

This is to argue that everyone looking to build a business or build a career begin by forging an entrepreneurial mindset and skill set; to gather the mental tools to navigate the rapid acceleration of change. In no time in history has entrepreneurship arisen as a more viable strategy - not only for one’s career but perhaps more importantly, in the conduct of one’s way of living.

In 2014, there are five reasons that unequivocally dictate that entrepreneurship is the most valued skill essential for meeting the social, economic and personal challenges that will continue to surface in expeditious succession. Keep in mind just how visible these five situations are experienced in our daily lives. These five reasons include:

- History says that most of us are the real entrepreneurs
- Roadblocks and the status quo are actually good for entrepreneurs
- The new workplace is self-directed
- Our social safety nets have vanished
- Launching a business has never been easier or cheaper

1. History Says Most of Us Are the Real Entrepreneurs

Our paradigms of entrepreneurs are laden with false images created by a sensationalist media. An historical look at entrepreneurs takes the mystery out of how businesses have been built; not by super

intelligent, capital-laden off-springs of the Carnegie or Rockefeller lineage but by frustrated, opportunistic, nonconforming, creative souls who could not be satisfied with existing solutions. Reading the stories of these real world entrepreneurs, one gets the insight that success does not come from attending the proper universities or securing a wad of money but rather from:

- Stumbling upon an opportunity
- Feeling “dumb” for not understanding something
- Having spent years on something that only an outlier would passionately embrace
- Feeling the need to fulfill an intrinsic calling or
- Needing income as other avenues begin to dwindle

In four out of five cases, money was not an issue until it was time to grow!

History also shows that successful entrepreneurs may start raw, naive and ignorant but that their growing determination developed a fervent mindset that grew open, inquisitive, innovative, gritty and energized. They realized that executing their plans even if failure resulted was an essential learning process that provided better answers, now eagerly waiting in the wings to be tried. In other words, entrepreneurs are mostly ordinary folks who sought answers with extraordinary fervor. It is to say that no one started with qualifying skills or an unrelenting passion but that the passion grew as the skills heightened. Consider reading about Steve Jobs, Anita Roddick, Richard Branson, Michael Jordan and numerous actors.

2. Roadblocks and the Status Quo Make Entrepreneurship Successful

We can be discouraged by existing voices – internal and external - that want us to conform rather than encourage us to find our own voice. One will note that entrepreneurs succeed by breaking the rules, not following the rules. But the need for both is essential for entrepreneurship to thrive. Innovations do not happen without long held institutions such as government, large corporations and educational institutions staying locked into their cultures and methodologies. As times change, these institutions require new ways of conducting themselves – sometimes willingly and sometimes not – in order to remain relevant. As websites such as “innocentive.com” have emerged, they have proven the old adage that those who create the problem cannot fix the problem. “Innocentive” publicly posts unresolved internal projects of corporations because no one inside these companies has been able to come up with answers. Invariably, all the problems are solved – by outsiders who hold no preconceived notions nor are governed by long standing cultural “groupthink.”

A more essential concept that rocks the boat for social fixtures is called “disruptive innovation.” This states that when a product or service is at the peak of its productivity, it will begin to lose its effectiveness because it has established a benchmark for the next big thing to replace it (think records to cassette tapes to CDs to MP3s). Entrepreneurs swarm onto this opportunity to build something cheaper and better. This then disrupts the status quo and a new trend begins to brew into a new tradition. (Google Clayton Christensen’s landmark papers and books on disruptive innovation.)

Thus, the need for stagnant industries and institutions is necessary for entrepreneurs to thrive. One example of this is how Oakland has one of the highest payrolls of any municipal government yet continues to eliminate social services for its residents. This way of running government has been a long-standing practice even when alternatives must be considered. This provided opportunities for new startups to congregate in Oakland with new services, new restaurants, new retail and new products, making the city one of the nation’s hot beds for entrepreneurs during this past decade. The bankruptcy of Detroit is also proving to be a magnet for entrepreneurs because well-embedded bureaucracies cannot hold a mindset for real change, only great talk points. Another is the inability of oil companies to wean themselves from oil exploration giving new startups in solar, wind and hydrogen a boost to their foothold on the future direction of our energy platforms. Other examples include book publishing’s initial refusal to digital formats and ditto for photography. Perhaps the most famous case occurred at the turn of the 20th Century when the director of the US Patent Office declared that there was no longer a need for his office because everything that will be invented has

been invented! (Over a century later, the patent office is receiving more applications than at any time in its history.)

3. The New Workplace is Self-Directed

Nowadays, most companies are required to run lean with more technical tools in order to compete especially with globally delivery systems making foreign businesses almost as convenient as local ones. It has meant leaner staffs, signifying the new role of each employee to learn multiple skills, mainly technical and to self-direct their own work, much like independent contractors providing their expertise to the overall result. Thus, the lines between employment and small business ownership are blurring. Just as the global economy has flattened itself through technology and its competitive nuances, our own workplaces have flattened out in order to remain competitive since the 1980s. Our “neighborhoods” need to be calculated not just as physical locations but as convenient, cost effective communities that exist through easy-to-reach contractors across the Internet.

In fact, more businesses are selecting contractors in favor of hiring permanent employees to keep their costs down. To illustrate how this has changed our working environment: in 2010, the US Bureau of Statistics revealed that 30 percent of the working population was self-employed with that figure predicted to reach 40 percent by the end of this decade (one self-employment association in New York has declared that it will top 60 percent by 2020).

The Ewing Marion Kaufmann Foundation of Kansas City which performs extensive research on America’s small businesses and entrepreneurship found that one million jobs were being permanently downsized by large corporations each year while three million jobs were being created annually by entrepreneurs forming new, small companies usually with four or less employees. This 2010 survey found that 100 percent of the job growth in America was coming from this new, small business sector. Not only are these new businesses defining new markets and new industries, many are thriving as they return to large corporations that continue to need the expertise they eliminated during their downsizing. But now, these larger firms buy services a la carte on an as-needed basis.

Other surveys have showed that employers expect employees to be technically savvy and fully responsible for completing their work on time whether it takes 30 or 60 hours. Counting the hours is becoming a fruitless exercise when what matters most is completion of the work to specifications, on time and on budget. Because younger workers are more willing and capable of working longer hours at less pay with higher technical skills, they are defining the new standards for the workplace.

Older workers, on the other hand, bring superior work experiences, better soft skills such as their ability to speak effectively with customers, show up on time and to communicate clearly with their coworkers. Their big downfall is their inability to master new technical skills in rapid fashion. But using the principles of “Rapid Skills Acquisition” as described in *The First 20 Hours*, anyone will be able to train more speedily to stay competitive.

4. Our Social Safety Nets Have Vanished

A companion to the self-directed workplace is the need for self-directed social service, a self-imposed rag-tag system necessitated by the lack of government-funded social programs that once-upon-a-time made it easier for us to afford our education, pay reasonable medical expenses, find affordable housing, save adequately for emergencies and retirement and provide an overall safety net for a multitude of incidental yet critical needs.

Because of this on-going trend towards less and less social assistance, we need to fend for ourselves like never before. For many, the onslaught of diminishing services has been a numbing experience much like a deer-in-the-headlight because we have not been trained to deal with the gaping insecurities now confronting us. With no job security and less government protection, our expenses have risen; sometimes to the point of bankruptcy, homelessness and physical/mental breakdowns.

Our biggest hurdle is in helping our working populations (ages 18 to 72) to recalibrate their thinking so that self-directed, entrepreneurial thinking dominates their conceptual landscape. We continue to battle an education system based in an Industrial Age paradigm producing task-oriented workers when the new workplace needs self-directed contractors who can conceive of the project, lay out the goals and established the tasks, perform the work and then set up the next logical project.

Fortunately, more enlightened organizations, both public and private, are finding that training in entrepreneurship holds a universal key to resolve the many groups now negatively affected by the cutbacks in social services. Today, we are seeing entrepreneurship training programs surfacing with youth without soft skills, the formerly incarcerated without job skills, people with disabilities with restrictive conditions (the majority of who are at the poverty level), and older unemployed workers facing age discrimination.

As entrepreneurs, we are more adept, both from a fluid mindset and skills, to solving these social and economic concerns by forging creative solutions that may turn into businesses or serve just ourselves. While we may understand the injustice and the hardships the economy causes, particularly among the poor, our training gives us a mindset to work towards solutions so that our own lives are less affected by cutbacks now happening year after year.

5. Launching a Business Has Never Been Easier or Cheaper

Lastly, the ability to launch new businesses has never been easier or cheaper because so many free or inexpensive tools are available on the Internet. Google has numerous free applications that serve entrepreneurs well. *LibreOffice* and *OpenOffice* are powerful free applications that rival Microsoft Office. Accounting software such as *Freshbooks* is not only free but as complete as you'll need. You can build a free website using *WordPress*. Social media through Facebook and LinkedIn can serve as a free marketing forum that targets your specific audience. And because the web is worldwide, you can actually go local in hundreds of locations by specifying what matters to each locale. In fact, this strategy has come to be known as "glocalization." To find a wealth of free applications, go to www.allmyapps.com.

While these technical tools can be intimidating to older individuals attempting to find work or considering starting their own business, many also have faced job discrimination based on assumptions of their less-than-competitive technical skills, their unwillingness to work extra hours and their need for higher salaries. As a result, many older workers have experienced extensive unemployment which is the reason why individuals between the ages of 55 and 64 are the largest group of new entrepreneurs. In fact, since 1998, Baby boomers have had a higher rate of entrepreneurial activities than Gen Y. In 2012, nearly 24 percent of all boomers started businesses.

Yet, a staggering statistic indicates that 60 percent of all businesses are doomed to failure by their third year, according to the US Bureau of Statistics. In contrast, 89 percent of all new businesses that are nurtured, incubated and/or receive technical business assistance from entrepreneurial organizations such as the ***Renaissance Entrepreneurship Center*** reach the all-important five-year benchmark when steady clientele and steady profits are realized. This type of assistance no longer requires high tuition or high rent because innovative foundations and publicly-funded institutions are hitching themselves to the entrepreneurial bandwagon. These forward-thinking groups understand the holistic approach necessary to build a thriving economy so that entrepreneurs, especially those with financial challenges, will be helped by these physical centers. In turn, what was lacking in our society will be creatively fulfilled by entrepreneurs.