

# I Am My OWN business

Everyone is an entrepreneur. The only skills you need to be an entrepreneur: an ability to fail, an ability to have ideas, to sell those ideas, to execute on those ideas, and to be persistent so even as you fail you learn and move onto the next adventure.

James Altucher

"All human beings are born as entrepreneurs. But unfortunately, many of us never had the opportunity to unwrap that part of our life, so it remains hidden."

Dr Muhammad Yunus

These are excerpts from Carl Schramm's latest book **BETTER CAPITALISM (2012)**. In it he makes the case that every student must be taught entrepreneurial skills in order to survive in today's global workplace, and that as this type of learning is massively scaled, the economic impact will be felt in family, community and country.

We do not claim to have the answer to the hugely difficult problem of giving native-born children and their parent(s) a better chance to improve their station in life and, in their own way, realize the American dream. Indeed, we strongly doubt that there is any one answer or magic bullet. But two propositions, we believe, must be part of any solution.

First, since education vastly increases the earning power of individuals— the lifetime premium for completing college over finishing high school is still about \$ 1 million— innovative ways must be found to give students the skills they need to keep learning throughout life and, at the very least, reduce the chances that they will drop out before they finish high school. We argue in the next section that teaching students how to launch a real business, along with the necessary skills, is likely to be an important part of both the in- and out-of-classroom school experience.

Second, public policy must find ways of harnessing the entrepreneurial energy of both private- and public-sector institutions and individuals to change the culture that condemns both children and adults to life at the bottom of the economic ladder. We have some sketchy answers below that address this challenge, but sketchy is better than none. Most important, the need to begin this particular conversation in order to stimulate more and better ideas could not be greater or more urgent.

The entrepreneurship we speak of in this chapter is different than the growth entrepreneurship we have emphasized in the book up to now. Here we refer to the need for as many people as possible to have an entrepreneurial mind-set and set of skills— that is, to be able and eager to engage in continuous innovative, out-of-the-box thinking, to be flexible and adaptable to changing circumstances, and perhaps most important, to be able to implement ideas or seize opportunities by launching a real business, or to carry out the project within an existing

organization. **These are real skills that must be taught and conveyed to all members of society and drawn on throughout their lives, especially for those who start out with huge disadvantages. It is both an economic and a moral imperative.**

But even repairing the overall K– 12 educational system still does not necessarily ensure that it will equip students with all the skills they will need to succeed in twenty-first century labor markets. The most important skills in the modern labor market include the desire to continue learning well past formal schooling and the ability to continuously

adapt to, and ideally anticipate, the needs of employers and potential customers (for those thinking of launching a business or who already have one). Gone are the days when one could learn the basics, graduate and go work for a large corporation until retirement. Graduates from high school, college, or graduate school today can expect to be in many different jobs throughout their career, even if they do not start their own business. Indeed, technology and shifts in consumer wants give rise to new jobs and occupations.

These skills must be taught to every young student in their most formative years – the years before they turn 12. The only way to do this on a massively scalable basis is to use a kid-driven, game-based learning platform where the child is motivated to learn and practice the skills on their own accord without the need of a teacher nor classroom time.

The positions of privacy officer or social networking supervisor, to name a couple, were unheard of several years ago but now are increasingly found in many companies. To navigate this complicated terrain, **people need to think of themselves as their own business**, one that must continue to learn and to innovate by developing or adapting new skills that the marketplace requires. Most of these perpetual “students” will put their ever-evolving skills into the service of employers. But many will choose to work for themselves and hire others to follow them. Regardless, all of us, and **especially our children**, will need entrepreneurial skills our entire working lives.

Several key questions loom, however. What kind of formal school curriculum (primarily K– 12, but also in college) will best equip individuals for the entrepreneurial challenges they will face as adults? Is entrepreneurial training best taught

inside or outside the classroom, or a combination of both? Ideally, there would be clear and well-researched answers to both of these key questions. Unfortunately, that is not the case, at least so far. Instead, the best we can offer now are our own inclinations, which are rooted in nearly a decade of grant-making experience at a foundation committed to advancing both entrepreneurship and education.

Clearly, success in the workplace and in any entrepreneurial endeavor requires some mastery of certain basic skills— reading comprehension, mathematical reasoning (at least algebraic and ideally statistical), scientific understanding, and information technology proficiency. But these are hardly sufficient. Other less tangible skills are also crucial. Teamwork is important in any endeavor and can be learned through participation in sports or other group and school activities. Creative thinking, as expressed through art, design, music, or other mediums, is also important. Steve Jobs’s and Apple’s success provide clear proof. Jobs credited a calligraphy course he took in college (almost as an afterthought) as his inspiration to include multiple fonts in Apple’s software. Moreover, Apple would

This concept of “I Am My Own Business” is a revolutionary way of thinking about entrepreneurship – it’s not just for the few of us insane risk-takers, but rather for everyone that will be or will be a part of our fast-paced global economy with new jobs and opportunities appearing and disappearing on a regular basis. Every business person, employee, homemaker, student, grandparent, etc. Basically anyone who wants to survive and thrive in the 21<sup>st</sup> century

not be the successful company it is today without a strong commitment to elegant design accompanying its innovative engineering.

**Unfortunately, we know of no K– 12 school or set of schools that has successfully developed a curriculum centered on entrepreneurship—**

developing new ideas and implementing them by launching real enterprises— that can be easily duplicated by other schools. The Kauffman Foundation took some initial steps in this direction in September 2011 when it opened in Kansas City,

Missouri, the first charter school in the United States operated and funded by a foundation. The school targets students from a low-income background starting in the fifth grade.

Like many other charter schools, it had far more applicants than the hundred available spots in the first class, and so the first class was ultimately chosen by lottery.

**Although the new Ewing Marion Kauffman School will not teach “an entrepreneurial curriculum” in the sense in which we have just described it,** the school will introduce entrepreneurial themes, both in and out of the classroom, in each of the grade levels until graduation.

**What might an entrepreneurial curriculum actually look like? Answering that question well and implementing the answer is one of the great educational challenges of this century.**

We have only some preliminary thoughts on the matter, which we hope will stimulate others more qualified to flesh out other ideas or put real meat on the bare bones of the following.

We believe— but admit we cannot yet prove— that an entrepreneurial secondary education is not only important pedagogically, but is also a potentially powerful way to address the dropout problem. One important reason driving high dropout rates surely is that too many kids are bored by school and see it as irrelevant to

Not until we showed up at the scene (Carl’s own words in my conversations with him)

This needs to be done outside of the school system – otherwise it will fail as all other initiatives do.

Even their own charter school which they had 100% control over, could not make this happen.

It will never happen within the school bureaucracy.

This is the question that we have answered with our “learning English as we’re learning how to be an Entrepreneur” model.

their lives, now or in the future (to the extent that kids, who are notoriously present-thinking, even think about the future— they should be taught this as well).

**How to earn money, however, is one thing that all kids understand.**

As a simple matter of common sense, instruction that equips them with the skills to legally earn a living and provides them with examples of how others whom they admire and can identify with have done so is central to keeping their interest. Role models, of course, will vary from child to child and over

time, but it should not be too difficult to figure out who they are, **or for students**

**themselves to point the way.** Most teenagers,

for example, would have a natural interest in how sports teams, various entertainers, television shows, and video game companies get started and generate earnings. Certain students

may display interest in industries with narrower appeal, such as fashion, food, or retailing. Unlike participation in sports teams, which necessarily must be limited to a chosen few, the understanding of business and what it takes to start and grow one can be made available to all students.

If taught correctly and **constantly reinforced in different contexts throughout a student's K– 12**

**education**, launching a business can be placed within the grasp and dreams of everyone. The same cannot be said for a career in professional sports, or even music or the arts. As Scott Adams, creator of the famous Dilbert cartoon

series, aptly puts it: I understand why the top students in America study physics, chemistry, calculus and classic literature. The kids in this brainy group are the future professors, scientists, thinkers and engineers who will propel civilization forward. But why do we make B students sit through the same classes? That's like trying to train your cat to do your taxes— a waste of time and money. Would it

This is our initial extrinsic motivator in many of our quests, etc. But it can also become an intrinsic motivator as you become more wealthy, you are able to help more people and become a greater impact for good.

Sounds a lot like our mentor program for middle and high school students.

Constant reinforcement to us means the child is applying the principles on a daily basis in a "real world" virtual community that is a safe place to learn and fail and learn.

not make more sense to teach B students something useful like entrepreneurship?

We agree wholeheartedly with this sentiment, but with one exception. Entrepreneurship is for A students too, for many of them also will change the world.

**Entrepreneurial interest is best stimulated through actual participation in a wide range of out-of-school activities.** Equipping budding entrepreneurs with the right set of skills is no different than drilling gifted athletes, musicians, writers, and other professionals in extensive exercises. “Practice makes perfect” is much more than an aphorism— it is the key to success in any pursuit.

Our LASER model is based on Learn, Apply, Share, Experience and Reflect. These are all extensive exercises that the child will do on their own outside of the classroom.

### **Entrepreneurship as One Ticket Out of the Underclass**

As difficult as it is to transform and improve the U.S. K– 12 educational system— especially for students from low-income families— an even more imposing challenge is how to provide opportunity for adults mired in poverty, not only for themselves, but for their children.

If the parents’ lives are not also improved then the children have a great chance of being trapped in the same depressing, vicious cycle of poverty. Clearly, we are not the first to recognize or attempt to address this challenge. Lowering the poverty rate has been a pressing national goal for all of our adult lives, especially since President Lyndon Johnson’s famous declaration of a “war” on poverty.

Read this keeping in mind the concept of our Grandparent app that can engage both the child and their Grandparent or Parent in a friendly “business competition” where the child and the adult are learning the skills to succeed in their virtual businesses that may even become a real business in the real world.

Unfortunately, despite politicians’ tendency to declare war on all kinds of domestic policy problems, such as cancer or drugs, these efforts have mixed results at best. Such is true of the war on poverty as well. Many approaches have

been tried, ranging from just giving the poor more money in cash; in-kind vouchers or their equivalents, such as food stamps, health care, and housing allowances; and access to legal services and job training. Nothing seems to have made a significant impact. During times of economic expansion, small dents have been made in the poverty rate, although some measurements, such as consumption, indicate that the poverty rate has fallen on account of the cheaper prices of goods like food and appliances.

Nonetheless, poverty, however it is defined, remains with us and is a disturbing reminder that a rising economic tide does not necessarily lift all boats. To some, what needs to accompany that tide is a cultural transformation that changes the mind-set of the poor. To others, poverty is something that cannot be helped because those mired in it either do not have the intelligence to change their lives, or after growing up in dysfunctional schools and environments they are unable to change.

We understand this pessimism, as well as the “poverty fatigue” that many citizens may have, given how impervious poverty seems to the many different public policy approaches that have been used in an attempt to remedy it. But we are not ready to give up. There are many anecdotal success stories of individuals who grew up in poverty and escaped to have hugely successful lives— Oprah Winfrey, Chris Gardner (the homeless salesman who became a stockbroker and is featured in the best-selling memoir and movie, *The Pursuit of Happyness*), and Robert Johnson, the founder of the BET network— to name a few. To write off the millions who are still caught in the underclass as being incapable of improving their fortune is shortsighted and wrongheaded.

Up to now, the generally accepted assumption about reducing poverty is that the poor must be trained to work for someone else. Few have dared to think that perhaps some of the poor, with the right training and policy reforms, might actually be able to create a job for themselves and perhaps even for others as well.

Accordingly, there is a vacuum to be filled. Would-be entrepreneurs in low-income neighborhoods need specialized assistance to get started. Current entrepreneurship training needs to be adapted to the skill levels of those attending, and even translated into different languages so that materials are

accessible to individuals from diverse ethnic backgrounds. In addition, the people needed to conduct this kind of training require unique skill sets that are different from the skills required to serve as leaders and mentors for a primarily middle-class clientele. With municipal and state budgets already stretched to breaking point, there is the obvious question of where the money for all this will come from. Local foundations are one obvious source, but so are local companies that stand to benefit from more prosperous and safer communities with stronger, more stable entrepreneurial roots.

Ideally, this idea would have an entrepreneurial champion like Wendy Kopp, who started Teach For America. Hopefully, there are similar advocates out there, perhaps reading this book, who will launch a low-income entrepreneurship initiative equivalent to Teach For America, possibly to be staffed by recent college graduates and assisted by local entrepreneurs.

A truly scalable and effective solution would be to bring the parents and grandparents into the business creating experience with their child and engage in a friendly competition and/or learning experience together.

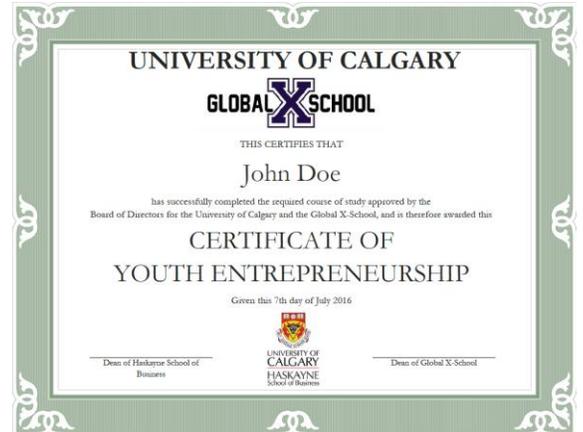
Such a program would build an entrepreneurial path out of poverty for many enterprising, low-income individuals who have for too long been ignored by the policymaking community. **In short, an entrepreneurial growth agenda for low-income individuals and neighborhoods can become the impetus that begins to lift many out of poverty and toward a better life.** Entrepreneurship may not be a silver bullet that cures poverty— there is no such thing— but it is one powerful weapon the potential of which is not yet even close to being fully deployed. If you are not convinced yet, then consider the entrepreneurial revolutions that are lifting huge numbers of people out of poverty in countries like China and India. Why not here?

Fortunately, for those willing to look for them, there are ample opportunities to gain basic entrepreneurial training in community colleges and even online, at minimal cost. **Indeed, with the growing popularity of online universities and the marketplace's increasing acceptance of their degrees, individuals who put forth the effort to educate themselves have greater opportunities**

Our certificate program branded by post secondary institutions like the University of Calgary (see sample certificate below) will become a revolutionary new way for universities to extend their reach and influence around the world.

**than ever before to learn and become certified for new jobs and careers.** This trend will only continue as online education becomes mainstream.

The federal government could help in this regard **by urging accrediting organizations to accredit individual online courses for college credit**, rather than restricting accreditation to entire online schools as is the case now.



Whether individuals work for themselves through the businesses they create or for others, they will be well equipped for the future if they constantly think like entrepreneurs. They must look for the next opportunity and plan for multiple outcomes. Indeed, individuals who only have a “Plan A” for their career, next job, or business will be at a disadvantage relative to those who have many different plans and are ready to implement those plans B, C, or D, either by seeking out the required training or starting new enterprises themselves.

As the title of a book one of us (Schramm) has written puts it, we are all facing an “entrepreneurial imperative.” Again, we are not claiming that entrepreneurial education, or even an entrepreneurial mind-set, will protect everyone in the middle class from the tumultuous changes in the marketplace’s demand for skills, a circumstance that is likely to intensify with more rapid growth. We do argue, however, that a commitment to lifelong learning is the best insurance one can purchase against economic retrogression in this new environment. There are really no other alternatives.

## **Conclusion**

As we have argued throughout this book, a faster-growing economy will not be possible without continuous entrepreneurial revolution. In turn, the entrepreneurs who lead these revolutions almost certainly will earn substantial rewards. Historically, Americans have not begrudged them these rewards so long as there are opportunities for everyone, regardless of their initial station in life, to realize their own American dream. People throughout the world justifiably resent political and economic systems that do not reward merit. Resentment breeds

backlash that can drive governments, whether autocratically ruled or democratically governed, to adopt policies that slow the pace of growth in the interest of slowing or preventing wider inequality gaps. This is an outcome that must be zealously avoided, and can be as long as our society remains committed to keeping the doors of opportunity wide open. It is undeniable that they are more open to people with inherited abilities, especially those augmented by family status, just as the doors are more difficult to keep open to those who are born into families and neighborhoods of limited means. But even with these unequal starting positions, many Americans have found the way to level the playing field and climb to a higher socioeconomic status than the one to which they were born. Education has been, and must continue to be, central to that effort. What is different about the twenty-first century, we posit, is that **new kinds of education, throughout one's life, will be needed to keep the doors of opportunity open to as many people as possible. This is especially true for those who start out with huge disadvantages. An education that focuses on giving students and eventually adults a continuing thirst for learning and chances to satisfy that thirst is required. This, we suggest, is best accomplished by impressing upon all people, from the earliest possible age, that they are entrepreneurs who control their destinies. An entrepreneurial mind-set, augmented with the skills of recognizing and acting on opportunities, is the key to success in the future.** It is also central to sharing the rewards of entrepreneurial growth, not by force, but because they have been earned. That has been America's history. It is also America's destiny.

This is what we do.

As we have noted at several points throughout this book and are closing with now, the United States exists because of a shared commitment to a set of ideas about governance and the way our economy works. The Great Recession spoiled the faith of many in these ideas, and in the business and political leaders who espoused them. But the economic downturn has not shaken Americans' faith in the ability of entrepreneurs to lead us toward better times. We hope that readers of this book will be even more committed to this proposition now that they have read it, and supportive of policies and practices that will facilitate the entrepreneurial growth to permanently improve our lives and those of future generations.

# OTHER VOICES ON ENTREPRENEURSHIP FOR EVERYONE

I don't believe that everyone should start a business. However, I do believe everyone should become an entrepreneur.

'Entrepreneur' is not a job title. It's the state of mind of people who want to alter the future.

**Guy Kawasaki, The Art of the Start2**

"The invitation to entrepreneurship isn't always to risk your financial security in order to launch a company. It is simply to understand the power you have to change the future for yourself and the world around you.

Entrepreneurs understand cause and effect and that the decisions they make and the things they do today will ripple into tomorrow. They know there is always a way to create momentum in the right direction, irrespective of opportunity.

So, regardless of whether you own a business or not, change the way you think. Become an entrepreneur and begin to experiment with intentional living.

Start noticing the problems around you, dream up solutions and entrepreneur the world around you.

Beyond fear, there is an entrepreneurial state of mind that is intent on altering the future. It is in that state of mind that anything is possible."

**Stephen Hicks, WSJ article, Professor – Entrepreneurship Rockford University**

Everyone is an entrepreneur. The only skills you need to be an entrepreneur: an ability to fail, an ability to have ideas, to sell those ideas, to execute on those ideas, and to be persistent so even as you fail you learn and move onto the next adventure.

**James Altucher, Entrepreneur, Best Selling Author, Hedge Fund Manager**

Everyone has the potential to be an entrepreneur. It's just that not everybody gets the opportunity.

**Richard Branson, Entrepreneur**

"All human beings are born as entrepreneurs. But unfortunately, many of us never had the opportunity to unwrap that part of our life, so it remains hidden."

**Dr Muhammad Yunus**

It turns out that it's not just startups that do not want traditional employees, Google does not want them, small businesses don't want them, agencies don't want them.

Who do they want then? Entrepreneurs.

And companies are going to great lengths to get them.

For example 30% of large tech companies already set up a seed fund to provide capital for startup entrepreneurs. Inside companies, entrepreneurship is more welcome than ever before in history. The term "intrapreneur" dates back to 1992, but it is now that intrapreneurship became a global phenomenon with companies hiring entrepreneurs-in-residence, holding hackathons, which are company-wide startup competitions, and letting employees have the "20% time" to work on creative side projects.

The entrepreneurial worker is popular. The question is then, What happened to the traditional employee, the one that you could tell what to do and she would do it. Does literally everyone need to become an entrepreneur?

The answer is robots. Employees who acts like robot, that is just do what they are told, is quickly becoming obsolete.

Consider an airplane building factory. You have a choice of hiring two people at \$50,000 per year or buying a robot for \$250,000 that will serve you for 15 years, without coffee break, 365 days a year 24 hours a day and no personal circumstances.

No wonder robots are catching on. Today world's robot population is around 10 Million. In South Korea, the leader in using industrial robots there are 347 robots

per 10,000. How good are they? By 2030 it is estimated that robots will perform as well as humans at most manual jobs. That means most of us would be smart to reconsider if our jobs will still exist in a 10 years.

The good news is that the one factor that robots don't have – the human factor – sets apart entrepreneurs. Entrepreneurs are the ones who understand humans, know the problems humans have and create value out of nothing.

It comes down to this: you need to create opportunities and sell. That's entrepreneurship. If you are a lawyer, you'll never make partner unless you get clients for the firm. That's selling. And if you don't want to make partner, than sit tight, you might be replaced by someone more entrepreneurial.

Oh come now, you might say. Everyone? Everyone must become an entrepreneur? You are right to be skeptical if you define entrepreneur as someone who creates a for-profit business. But that is a very limited definition. It doesn't include people who start things for social reasons. Or community reasons. And it certainly doesn't include people in organizations who take an entrepreneurial approach to solving the challenges they (and the enterprises that employ them face.) Or Homemakers that are faced with a daily flow of problems and issues flowing from the family.

You don't need to do much more than read the daily papers or look around to see what is happening to your friends and neighbors to understand why that is true. Given the steady improvement in technology which is automating people out of jobs; corporate reluctance to hire new employees; constant headcount reductions (designed to boost profits), and outsourcing of work, it is just silly to expect that you are going to join a company today and be set for life. (The fact that this statement strikes you as obvious, and that no one under the age of 40 knows what the phrase "company man" means, shows you just how far the workplace has evolved since the first Baby Boomers started to enter it.) The market doesn't care about your industry, your company or you. Your career will probably be disrupted. More than once. The point? You'd better be prepared to create something on the side, no matter what you are currently doing for a living. This is true if you're 18 or 58.

Even if you currently work for the world's best company, someone could acquire the firm tomorrow, or a new invention could render your entire industry obsolete

(rent many movies from a freestanding store lately; buy any maps, or a new set of encyclopedias?) Your work life is not completely within your control. And obviously, if you are out of work, you may be forced to become an entrepreneur.

At the least you should add entrepreneurial skills to your job hunting repertoire. But even if you are not one of the people who are affected by all the change sweeping through the economy, if you keep doing things as you are, chances are you will fall behind coworkers who show more initiative, creativity and entrepreneurial spirit.

This is why we believe, for numerous reasons, that every, yes EVERY K-12 student around the world needs to be taught how to think, act and succeed like an Entrepreneur. This real world education needs to start in their primary school years in the Global X-School where the child is learning, applying, sharing, experiencing and reflecting on a daily basis the skills that are going to help them become successful in whatever they choose to do in their life.

**GLOBAL X SCHOOL**

**I AM MY OWN BUSINESS**