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"Excellence is an art won by training and habituation. We do not act rightly because we have virtue or excellence, but we rather have those because we have acted rightly. We are what we repeatedly do.

Excellence, then, is not an act but a habit."

- Aristotle, Philosopher

The Maine Center for Career Preparation is a private, non-profit committed to improving the economic prospects of Maine citizens by improving the linkages between education and workforce development.

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Education Works!

Entrepreneurial Proteins

By Tom Broussard

One question we have consistently asked regarding entrepreneurs has been "What makes them tick?" There has been a myriad of books written about entrepreneurs and the way they picture the world around them.

Another question (and one that particularly intrigues me) is "What makes them *start* ticking?" As global competition has

increased there has been more and more talk about what entrepreneurs do, how they do it and how one becomes more entrepreneurial.

Entrepreneurship has certainly come to be recognized as one of the keys to success in the global marketplace.

The dictionary definition of an entrepreneur is "a person who organizes and manages a business-undertaking, assuming the risk for the sake of profit". That defines what makes them tick. Now we have to figure out what sets them to ticking in the first place.

While corporations have been competing for a long time, technology has leveled the playing field while advancing the level of play. Global competition is now personal. The people at Ashok Nalamalapu's company, I-CST in Portland compete (*and* collaborate) with others 10 time zones away on a personal level.

We need to increase the supply of entrepreneurs--that is a given. We also need to make sure that everyone else is simply more

entrepreneurial.

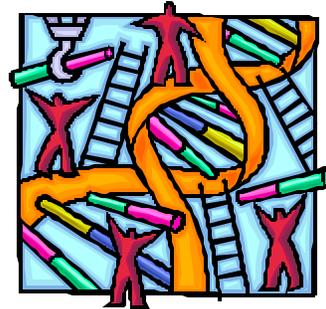
Whether you are an entrepreneur leading a small company or an individual contributor at a large company, we ALL have to be more of what we think entrepreneurs

are--risk takers, change agents and innovators.

But, can we create entrepreneurs on purpose, as it were?

I actually don't think so. Rather, I think our job is to create the environment from which entrepreneurs spring. It is sort of like starting primordial life without the primordial ooze. Our job is to make the ooze. The life will take care of itself.

So what would this ooze look like?



We know how entrepreneurs act. We know (at least some of) what makes them successful. So, how do we imbue anyone with characteristics that have more to do with *how* they are rather than *what* they do? Entrepreneurs exist in every walk of life--there are entrepreneurs in shipbuilding, fishing, education, pulp and paper, farming, map making...the list is endless.

But for all of those different pursuits, if there are entrepreneurs involved, they all share (to one degree or another) very similar characteristics--very similar DNA.

If we want life--the entrepreneurial life that we purport to create--to share certain DNA, then the environment from which they emerge must harbor the proteins from which that DNA will be built. While exploring Mars, the science is not looking for life as much as it is looking for the conditions that may have (or may yet) *support* life.

Now I am back to the ooze again.

Similarly, entrepreneurs may (and indeed, must) be built from "entrepreneurial proteins" at a point in their evolution when ALL aspects of *how* they will be (not necessarily *what* they will be) are being assembled.

A long, long time before the need to take risks, embrace change, and make choices becomes apparent--essentially before the need to act entrepreneurially arises--the proteins and DNA that enable that kind of activity must already be in place. If not, can

you imagine the utility of a class called Risk Taking 101, particularly for those students who have just graduated from the Advanced Placement class, Risk Aversion 401?

So, among the challenges to creating entrepreneurs "on purpose" is to understand what entrepreneurial proteins look like at the microscopic level when they still don't look like anything much--yet are absolutely fundamental to our ability to foster entrepreneurship when the time comes.

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Committing to the purposeful development of entrepreneurs through just such an education is to have faith that progress occurs (and must occur) long before any visible pattern of entrepreneurship emerges.

But then again, all education is an act of faith.

So, what are these "proteins"--these entrepreneurial values--and what do they look like? In particular, how do we teach them--or to consider it another way--how are they taught today?

Entrepreneurs take risks. Entrepreneurs embrace change. Entrepreneurs look for patterns and opportunities--they are curious. Entrepreneurs are competitive. Entrepreneurs are high-energy people. Entrepreneurs can deal with the risk of failure. Entrepreneurs know themselves. Entrepreneurs

are innovative and creative. Entrepreneurs ask questions. Entrepreneurs have a high tolerance for ambiguity--they have a particularly keen sense of relevance. And finally, entrepreneurs are "possibility thinkers".

Certainly not all entrepreneurs have all those things in equal measure or even in great measure.

What is certain however, is that the absence of those characteristics--the inability to take risks, the lack of curiosity, the absence of innovation will make entrepreneurship highly unlikely.

So how *do* we teach these things? How *do* we make entrepreneurs on purpose? The truth is...we don't.

Like all people, entrepreneurs are products of their environment--their culture. If the environment is risk averse; if it insists that there is a "right way" and a "wrong way" with no room for experimentation; if knowledge is dispensed rather than created without any sense of context or application, then that is what the products of the environment will reflect.

Entrepreneurial education starting in kindergarten can begin to shape the proteins and the DNA that ultimately may walk upright in the form of a Maine entrepreneur.

We need to create the culture--the environment--and the ooze--from which more Maine entrepreneurs can evolve.