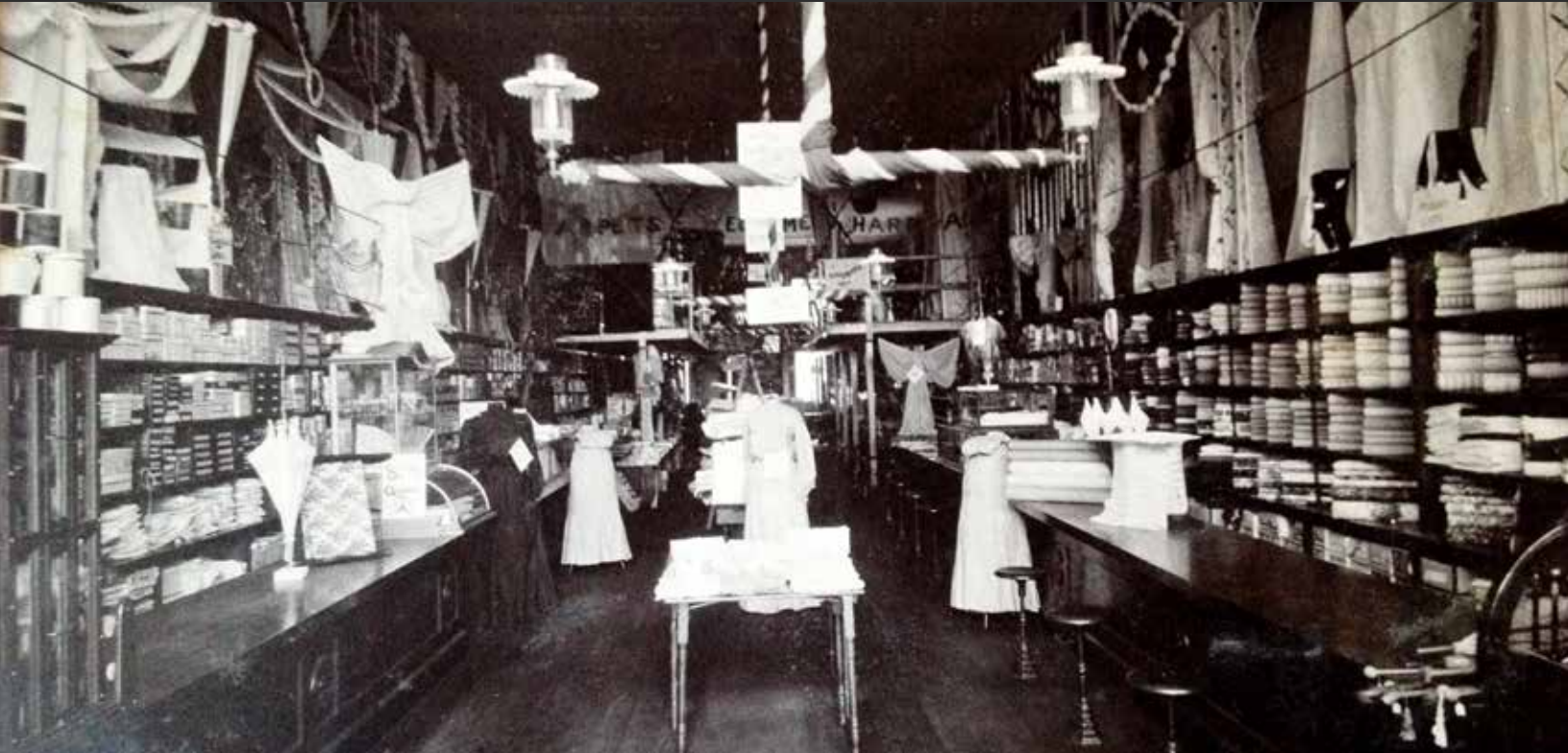


A Case for Freedomship and Entrepreneurial Education

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by Andrew Pudewa



Entrepreneurship and freedom were intricately woven through the original fabric of American culture. Ninety percent of those early Americans were owners... of farms, shops, trading vessels, small businesses. Freedom and faith marked these entrepreneurs whose success rested squarely on their hard work and integrity and the quality of their product. Today, more than ninety percent of Americans are employees. The ideal of ownership has been lost. And although many people do wonderful, respectable, important, and meaningful jobs, the mentality of an employee is vastly different from that of an entrepreneur.

What has happened to our entrepreneurial spirit? Where have “owners” gone? Oliver DeMille, in his teaching on leadership education, places the responsibility for this change on the educational system itself. With a brief history of this system, DeMille describes how schools gradually changed from educating individual talents to becoming a method of social engineering and standardization.

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During the Colonial period, most children learned their basic skills—reading, writing, and arithmetic—at home with their parents or mentors. Colleges, such as Harvard, Princeton, and Yale, were established as schools of divinity, designed to educate Christian leaders for a Christian nation. The country boasted high levels of literacy and produced people like Jefferson who were able to self-educate. The book, *A Thomas Jefferson Education* (George Wythe College Press, 2000), describes the mentorship style of this period.

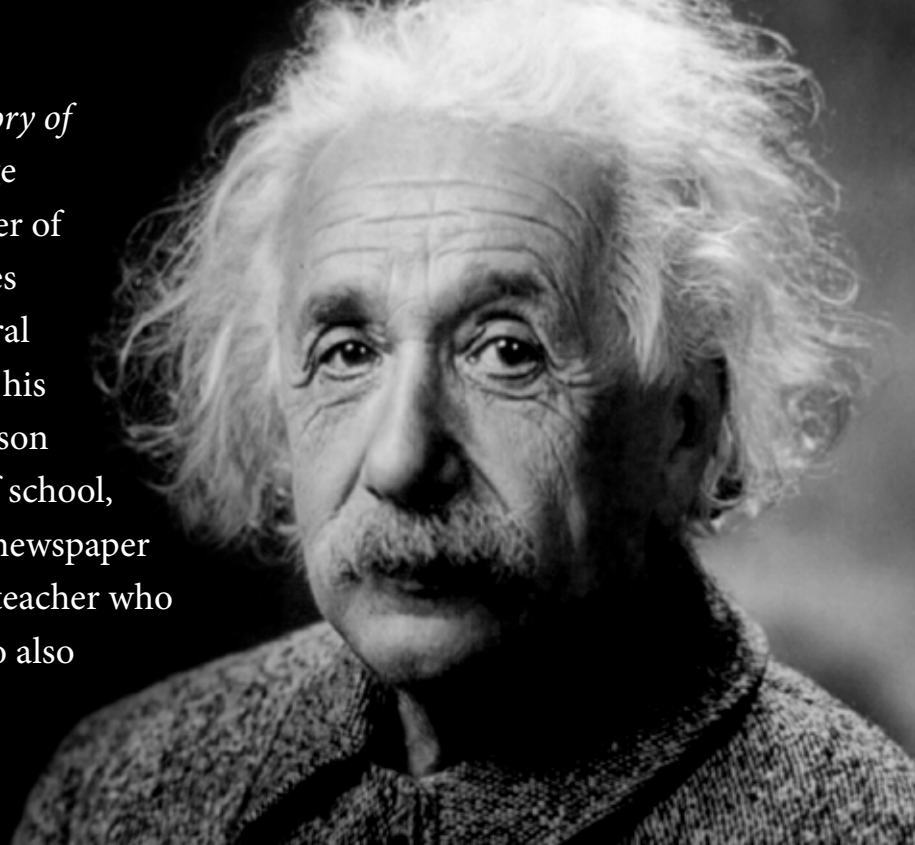
During the 1800s, the one-room schoolhouse was common. As many as forty children between the ages of six and sixteen learned in an environment that nurtured independence, cooperation, shared learning, and leadership. Older students helped younger students and gained teaching experience and leadership opportunities, while the younger students had role models to follow.

The Industrial Revolution of the mid and late 1800s created a great need for factory workers who could do mindless jobs for long hours, and this corresponded with the establishment of city schools, where children were segregated by grade or age. Children became less independent and more teacher-dependent. They had fewer opportunities to demonstrate leadership and, without their older role models, tended to adopt similar vocabulary and behavior as their peers, whether good or bad. This modern educational system began to produce its desired goal: a predictable, controllable, obedient workforce not possible in the earlier American climate.



New methods of instruction—based on German psychology aimed at creating this type of worker—were implemented in the classroom. Initially parents resisted, but by the early 1900s, most memory or understanding of the previous approach had faded, leaving only conveyor-belt education, where students enter in kindergarten or first grade and move through a standardizing system. By twelfth grade they are ready to enter the workforce or military. But we know that when children are age-segregated, any group will still exhibit two, three, or even four grade levels of aptitude in core subjects. To ensure success for all, standards must be lowered, then raised again when they fall too low. Grade level integrity fails, and children move to the next grade... ready or not.

In his book, *The Underground History of American Education* (Oxford Village Press, 2000), New York State Teacher of the Year John Taylor Gatto describes how David Farragut, the first admiral of the U.S. Navy, took command of his first ship at age twelve. Thomas Edison couldn't read and was kicked out of school, but by age fourteen was printing a newspaper and making more money than the teacher who removed him. **Albert Einstein**, who also did poorly in school, stated: "It is nothing short of a miracle that the modern methods of instruction



have not yet entirely strangled the holy curiosity of inquiry." History proves that all children want real, honest-to-God responsibility—to be relevant, to be needed, to be able to make a real contribution and a meaningful difference, but increasingly, students find schools to be uninteresting and irrelevant. Even Bill Gates asserts that the modern system of education is not meeting the needs of the modern economy, and that America's high schools are quickly becoming obsolete, in that they are not teaching our youth what they need to know for the continuation of a free and prosperous nation. We no longer live in an industrial economy, and the factory-model school won't meet the needs of our everchanging society.

Oliver DeMille, in *The Coming Aristocracy: Education and the Future of Freedom* (The Center for Social Leadership, 2009), suggests that entrepreneurial-style education is beneficial for the individual and for the nation. Without skilled, character-driven, competent people in the society, the whole society becomes susceptible to governance by the few, "the coming aristocracy," and an increasingly greater gap opens between those who "know" and those used as pawns of the whole system. The conveyor-belt system of education was useful for the industrial age but fails in the information age. Employers in every industry and field complain about college graduates today, arguing that "they can't speak properly, can't write properly, and don't think. They're worthless until we train them." What we need now—for the good of the country—is a nation of "owners."

A ‘freedomship’ and entrepreneurial education is therefore based on the idea of self-education, mentorship, and initiative. Though the word *freedomship* is not found in the dictionary, we are trying to coin this term, which refers to self-directed leaders in homes, families, businesses, and life. People who lead themselves well become responsible, independent, intelligent, well-educated citizens in a free country. *Entrepreneurship* is learning about business, economy, and activity, and an *entrepreneur* is “a person who organizes and manages any enterprise, taking on the initiative and the risk.” The word comes from the French word meaning “one who undertakes an endeavor.”

According to Peter Drucker, one of the foremost thinkers in the area of business success and entrepreneurship today, “Innovation is the specific instrument of entrepreneurship. It is the act that endows resources with a new capacity to create wealth.” And having the *means* to create wealth is, in essence, the key element of political and economic freedom.

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My own entrepreneurial drive began at age sixteen with selling war games out of the trunk of my car, and since then I have always been self-employed. When my two oldest children were twelve and ten, I started looking for resources that would help children learn how to start a business. I found a resource called Business Kids, which came in a game-style box and provided booklets, checklists, and planning forms to help children learn how to get their business started. That product was short-lived, but the idea never left me. When our company, Institute for Excellence in Writing, started publishing materials, I continued thinking about a curriculum that would integrate writing with practical tips for kids on how to plan and start a business. A few years ago, I came across someone who had created a sequence of lessons and activities that could be done with one child or a group of children. We have since licensed and published this excellent course under the title *Lemonade to Leadership*.



Again, entrepreneurial success rests squarely on hard work, integrity, and quality of product. When looking to start a business, ask yourself, “What service or product do you have the skills or resources to provide?” Other questions also help: “What are some of the needs in the neighborhood? What are some problems? What are some things people are too busy to do? What could you do that someone else couldn’t do? Will it work? Is it safe? Legal? Is it profitable? Can I get customers? Do I have access to what I need? Is it going to require start-up funds? Do I have time? Do I have the experience?” These questions, along with forms and simple writing activities found in the eight-lesson series, help to crystallize the thinking of the future entrepreneur and lay the foundation for setting goals, creating a name, doing market research, getting official, and starting to sell. Aimed at middle-school children, the course is simple, yet solid enough to help parents with businesses that students might like to start on the side.

We’ve only been publishing the program for about a year and have had several reports back from kids who’ve done this. I recently met an eleven-year-old boy who had gone through the lessons. He saw that restaurants provide crayons to children as they wait, and knew that children like crayons shaped into different things, such as fish, cars, and rocket ships. His idea was to melt down crayons into molds and then sell them to restaurants. So he convinced local schools and day cares to recycle their useless little crayon stubs, thus providing him with free materials. He melted the crayons into molds, then packaged, and marketed them. (I bought a package of four little fishy crayons from him for a buck. How could I not?) There is now a national chain of restaurants that wants to purchase his molded crayons. He is an articulate and enthusiastic eleven-year-old, and meeting him would convince anyone that there’s a bright future for this country.



I went through the process with my son and helped him start up a little business. Because he is profoundly dyslexic, reading and writing have always been hard, but he loves swords, so selling swords became his business. Together we figured out costs, selling price, profit margin, record keeping, marketing, etc. He would sell at conventions with a table near mine. I watched as he drew crowds. The boys liked the swords, the girls followed the boys, and the moms came to find their children. He developed this elaborate little impromptu speech explaining that when you buy a sword, you buy a bit of history, and that buying a sword was an educational purchase. I was very impressed.

However, his dyslexia caused him problems. One of the nicer-looking swords he was selling cost him \$16, so we decided that he should sell them for \$32. That seemed fair. Well, we took them to our next show, where he sold every last one of these swords. When we counted up his money, we found he was considerably short. Then I found a check for \$23. He had sold the swords at the inverted price! Rather than get discouraged, he simply changed the price at future shows to \$33, so that either way he was safe. For every problem there is a solution if you think about it. It was a hundred-dollar lesson, but well worth it.



Mentoring is essential to leadership education, because few children can succeed without guidance. This is where parents are key. Starting a family- or childrun business, whether it succeeds, breaks even, or loses a little money, is never a waste of time or resources. Every family should have a business; it is an educational opportunity—one that allows children to grow up making a meaningful contribution to the family. In all my business ventures, my children have assisted me; my older children helped me run a preschool. When I got the writing business started, they put the books together, collated discs, and hauled boxes at conventions. They learned to give some of my talks. I needed them and they knew it, which was a great thing for them to know growing up. The educational and social growth opportunities that a home business has afforded my children are irreplaceable.

Because there is significant correlation between activities learned at a young age and developing lifetime aptitudes, providing meaningful, challenging work for children is a lifetime gift. Another reason to encourage entrepreneurial activities at a young age is the fact that children are fearless, and this make learning easier—even when they make mistakes. It is the job of the mentor to stress that failures are just part of the lessons. What lessons are learned? My son learned that invisible things have costs. Dyslexia had a cost...along with his time, the booth, and the product. He also learned that although he is not good at everything, he is good at many things, despite his dyslexia. He has already decided to hire other kids to do what he can't or doesn't want to do. He has learned the value of teamwork and using his strengths.



I believe we are in a time when we will either rescue Western civilization, or we will watch it become something else. We can save America or watch it fall. We've had a period of safety and grace, but we are at critical mass in our economy, politics, education, and international influence. To regain what once made America great, we must raise children who know the truth and can communicate that truth powerfully—children who have evangelical and entrepreneurial energy that will preserve goodness, truth, and beauty. It is because I have this sense of urgency that I'm working hard to create things that support and encourage this mission. It requires courage and strength to be a parent in this century. Though the world opposes your attempts to nurture Christlike qualities in your children's minds and souls, it is possible to raise up children of wisdom, virtue, and good character.

Education cannot solve the world's problems. Neither can money. Both are tools. Bill McCartney of Promise Keepers maintains that, as with first-century Christianity, it all begins in the marketplace where the disciples of Jesus daily rubbed shoulders with the lost. Christian entrepreneurship is essential for bringing truth and goodness and beauty into the public arena. I commend you in this direction. The world will hate you for it, but if you persevere, you and your children can experience true and lasting success.

