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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!

Picture an Entrepreneur

By Tom Broussard

One question we have consistently asked regarding entrepreneurs has been “What makes them tick?” There have been a number 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. The winners of this competition will have lots of entrepreneurs on their team *and* they will know how to make more of them!

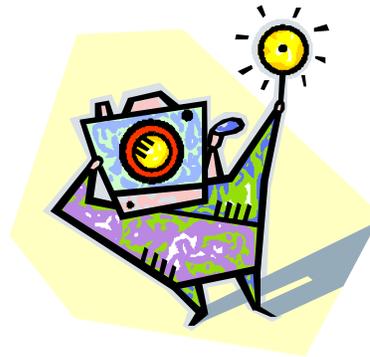
The dictionary definition of an entrepreneur is “a person

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.

Entrepreneurship has been widely recognized as one of the keys to success in the global marketplace.

While corporations have been competing for a long time, technology has

advanced the level of play. Global competition now plays out personally. People now compete with others 10 time zones away on a personal level. This has made the practice of entrepreneurship integral to success in the 21st century requiring that it be added to each of our personal skill tool kits. But how do we do that? How do we make everyone more entrepreneurial *and* increase the supply of entrepreneurs as well?



The analogy I use to help me visualize the mechanics of how entrepreneurs come into being (and whether they can be called into existence on purpose) is digital photography.

Digital photography accomplishes its task by assigning values (of shading and color) to each pixel. Pixels are the building blocks of the image that we see. The more pixels, the sharper the image. Each pixel is assigned its own individual shading and color values. Increasing the number of pixels increases the clarity of the image.

The more pixels there are and the more that any group of them are shaded one way or another, the better the photo resolves itself into something visible and recognizable. Insufficient pixels, or a random scattering of shaded pixels, may render the image unrecognizable or “pixelated.” The curious thing about pixels is that when viewed individually they make no sense whatsoever. At the pixel level they convey no hint of the ultimate image their collective values represent.

Similarly, entrepreneurs may (and indeed, must) have “entrepreneurial values” assigned at the pixel level long before an external observer can conclude anything about the pattern that may be developing.

So, among the challenges to creating entrepreneurs “on purpose” is to understand what entrepreneurial values look like at the pixel level when they still don’t look anything like our image of the entrepreneur when fully “developed.”

Committing to the purposeful development of entrepreneurs through entrepreneurial education is to have faith that progress occurs long before any visible pattern emerges.

People do not wake up one day and declare themselves entrepreneurs (even if it looks that way on the outside.) At the pixel level, the “value assignments” have been underway for quite some time before a “critical mass” of actions and instincts emerge that are recognizable by others as entrepreneurial.

So, what are those “value assignments” and what do they look like? In particular, how do we teach those values—or to consider it another way—how are those values currently taught?

Entrepreneurs take risks. Entrepreneurs ask questions. Entrepreneurs have a high tolerance for ambiguity and they have a particularly keen sense of relevance. Finally, entrepreneurs are “possibility thinkers.”

But how do we *teach* those things? How do we *make* entrepreneurs on purpose? The truth is...we don’t.

Like all people, entrepreneurs take their cues from the environment—the 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.

So, how do we picture an entrepreneur?

One pixel at a time.