

URL: <https://ecorner.stanford.edu/in-brief/the-entrepreneurial-fire-within/>

Andy Karsner, senior strategist and “Space Cowboy” at X, urges prospective entrepreneurs to focus on the “fire within.” A relentless passion for risk-taking and testing limits and boundaries no matter the available resources, he finds, defines the entrepreneurial mindset. If you have that mindset, he adds, everything else is acquirable.



Transcript

So these students who have come together today are here because they're interested in being an entrepreneur.. How do you define entrepreneurship for yourself and how are you an entrepreneur? - What a great question.. Well, I think of it as a privilege.. I wouldn't have described myself as entrepreneurial till somebody else did.. Years later, actually, I don't think anybody described me as an entrepreneur until I sold my first company.. But before that, they just said, "Yeah, there's that kid with a shoe box again." That kind of thing.. But an idea of course was removed from the entrepreneurial ecosystem that exists out here, it's so extraordinary.. If it were in the rest of the nation, anything like it, our productivity would be just multiplicative, but this is that argument of nature versus nurture.. Are you born an entrepreneur, can you learn entrepreneurship? I'm not sure, it's like so many other things are journalism, public speaking, et cetera what do you have a predisposition to? But I do believe that the common denominator no matter how well you do and that's whether you're running a local floral office that supports the baseball team, or whether you've got some limited partnership for a wind project or whether you're Elon Musk or Jonas at the moment.. In all cases, the person has got to be driven by what we used to call fire in the belly in Texas, I think you call it inner fire here, but you've gotta have something burning inside you that creates a relentless passion for risk-taking and achievement beyond resource, with the idea that you are going to create and add value..

And usually that latter thing, creating an add value is linked to the fire.. 'Cause if it's not, I never have known an entrepreneur that succeeded by exclusively focusing on money.. That's where certain things go wrong, in fact, sometimes they go off the rails completely and fail to self actualize.. But if you can be guided by something bigger and higher, something meaningful, it doesn't matter what it is.. It could be your family's name and legacy.. It could be your involvement in the Church or community.. It could be your love of the Redwood trees.. It could be wanting to solve COVID-19 with a vaccine or with swaps, whatever it is that you tether, your sense of value added mission that will ignite your fire, if you are the type of person who is an entrepreneur, you become a catalyst.. You look around the world and you don't see any obstacles of beaver dams, you see fresh tinder and you're gonna be the catalyst, and you're gonna create a bonfire of opportunity.. And so I think the relentless passion to me is the main thing..

Everything else is acquirable.. People say, "Well man, you either been lucky or (mumbles) "or something along the way." I always tell people, I don't didn't get MBA, so I only to have one real talent and I don't practice it all the time, and that is self-actualization.. And it's just knowing the limits and boundaries.. of your capability and inviting other people to share your fire and have a growth mentality to engage with them, accompany them on journey and pursue a common objective in a common way.. I think that formula is so beautiful in America and we've been proselytizers around the world of it.. I've seen Europe become more entrepreneurial.. Having gone to Sweden for 30 years that didn't exist 30 years ago.. And now you have Daniel Ek in Spotify, and just incredible entrepreneur epicenters.. all around the world.. And so I think it's proliferating in a beautiful and positive way...