

Why Unschoolers Grow Up to Be Entrepreneurs

Almost by definition, entrepreneurs are creative thinkers and experimental doers. They reject the status quo and devise new approaches and better inventions. They are risk-takers and dreamers, valuing ingenuity over convention. They get things done.

It shouldn't be surprising to learn that many unschoolers become entrepreneurs. Able to grow up free from a coercive classroom or traditional school-at-home environment, unschoolers nurture interests and passions that may sprout into full-fledged careers. Their creativity and curiosity remain intact, uncorrupted by a mass education system intent on order and conformity. Their energy and exuberance, while a liability in school, are supported with unschooling, fostering the stamina necessary to successfully bring a business idea to market. Like entrepreneurship, unschooling challenges what is for what could be.

The numbers are startling. In a survey of grown unschoolers, Boston College professor Peter Gray, along with his colleague Gina Riley, discovered that more than half of the grown unschoolers they interviewed were presently working as entrepreneurs. Many of the respondents indicated that their careers were directly linked to childhood interests that they followed into adulthood. Interestingly, the correlation between unschooling and entrepreneurship was the highest for the always-unschooled group, as compared to intermittent unschoolers.

Unschoolers Make Amazing Entrepreneurs

Anecdotally, the link between unschooling and entrepreneurship is fascinating. Karen Leong is a 19-year-old custom cake designer with her own flourishing small business. Unschoolled throughout her childhood, she learned about cake design from watching YouTube videos when she was 11. That triggered a sprouting interest, and she pursued additional, months-long courses in cake design and pastry work. Today, her business is expanding and she credits unschooling for playing a large role in her current entrepreneurial pursuits. In a recent interview for *New Straits Times*, she says about her upbringing: "My parents were very involved in my unschooling. It's essential that parents are very proactive in their child's unschooling journey, maintain open communications and have a strong relationship with their child."

Another grown unschooled entrepreneur is New Jersey contractor, Zachary Dettmore. In a recent interview with the *Lyndhurst Daily Voice*, Dettmore describes how growing up unschooled enabled him to pursue his interests, including his passion for building and construction that emerged when he was around eight-years-old. According to the article: "I was always interested in building and how things worked," he said, "so my reading as a

child was geared towards non-fiction topics that interested me. I wasn't pigeonholed into a one-size-fits-all education methodology." At 13, he took a timber-framing course and became increasingly committed to a career as a contractor. Now 29, Dettmore runs a successful custom contracting business with a couple of employees.

Entrepreneurship Is at the Heart of Unschooling

Successful entrepreneurs are self-starters, driven by their own passions and goals to create something new and different that has value to others. As self-directed learners, unschoolers are given the freedom early on to discover these passions and commit to these individual goals. They are allowed the time and space to explore, to tinker. Whether with their family, or while attending a self-directed learning center or unschooling school, unschooled children are surrounded by supportive adults eager to help connect their budding interests with the larger resources of their community, like classes and mentors. This process of pursuing individual passions while being supported by caring adults creates the ideal conditions for aspiring entrepreneurs to imagine new possibilities and leap into unknown enterprises.

As the American entrepreneur and author, Jim Rohn, once said: "Formal education will make you a living; self-education will make you a fortune." While all of us can benefit from his advice, unschoolers have a great head start.