

# **REVIEW by ASCD (Association For Supervision And Curriculum Development (Singapore))**

## **Student Entrepreneurship Programmes – Are We on the Right Track?**

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Richard Mak

### **1. The role our schools play in our student entrepreneurship development**

Though there is a clear need to develop the entrepreneurial potential of our students, this should not distract our educationists from their job of nurturing all-rounded students who will be good citizens for our nation.

The school's role is NOT to develop our students to be entrepreneurs while they are still in school. This is too onerous a task for our teaching profession. Our teachers are not exposed to business happenings. The school's role could be to ignite our students' interest in entrepreneurship and to provide them with a taste of what going into business is all about.

### **2. Student Co-operatives as a means to ignite entrepreneurial interest**

Many schools set up students' co-operatives as a vehicle to give students a taste of running a business outfit. The students' cooperative provides a simulated business environment where students are organized to man the counter, do stock-taking, place orders for goods, merchandizing and display of goods. They pick up operational skills in running the day-to-day affairs of a shop like customer service skills, inventory management skills, etc. They also develop a sense of responsibility and accountability as real money is used. However, operating a student co-operative is giving a taste of being an employee rather than being an entrepreneur. The retail-base setup does not provide scope to develop the sense of ownership and risk-taking; the spirit of independence; the desire to be resourceful and innovative nor inculcate the "never-say-die" attitude.

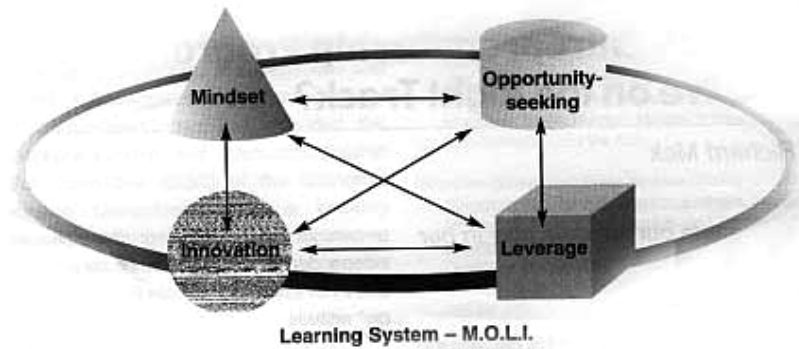


Notwithstanding the limiting scope of the student co-operative, the question that needs to be answered is - does running a student co-operative help to ignite students' entrepreneurial spirit? Newspaper articles on the school scene reported that some students find running a retail outlet tiresome and routine. If the sentiments reported are anything to go by, then running a student co-operative may not further the aim of getting students to be their own bosses in the future.

How are schools going to provide students with a taste of entrepreneurship and to expose them to the ecstasy and agonies of the business world?

# The Entrepreneurship Learning System (M.O.L.I.)

Going into business is daunting for most people (let alone teachers/students) as there are so many variables and unknowns to deal with. Surviving, much less success, is pretty elusive. To be successful, entrepreneurs need to stay focused on the few key variables in doing business. If we could identify these key variables to ensure entrepreneurship success what would these variables be?



As a business consultant and Master Trainer in Entrepreneurship, I have distilled the key variables for entrepreneurship success and developed them into an integrated Learning System: (M.O.L.I.) -Mindset, Opportunity-seeking, Leverage and Innovation. It is based on more than 15 years of research on entrepreneurship development.

## **Mindset**

Aligning your business goals with the passions in your life will help to propel you through obstacles. There are two categories of mindset. The Defensive Mindset will help you to overcome your fear of business failure and the Offensive Mindset enables you to enhance your willingness to venture out of your comfort zone with a "never-say-die" attitude.

## **Opportunity-seeking**

The cornerstone of entrepreneurship is opportunity seeking. I quote SM Lee, "Entrepreneurship is identifying an opportunity regardless of the sources currently available and executing that opportunity for the purpose of wealth creation, in the public, private and global sectors."

## **Leverage**

Leverage is about multiplying your resources by gunning for synergistic gains in every way. Examples include: through working with others, harnessing information technology and the Internet.

## **Innovation**

This variable underlies the importance of doing things differently and doing different things to sustain a business. Innovation also denotes the action-oriented approach to translate business possibilities to profitability.

The Mindset is the fuse waiting to be set alight by the Opportunities and Innovation after that you leverage on resources from the environment and off you go.

There are no guarantees to success but I am confident that my framework could greatly enhance the odds in business success.

## Play the Game Right! – The Fun Way to Serious Business

Based on the proprietary Learning System for Entrepreneurship Success, my associate, Mr Quek Joo Hock and I have invented the world's first board game for entrepreneurship training called "Zeros-to-Heros". This game is dedicated to aspiring entrepreneurs - students as well as adults. The ZEROS in the title refer to player who may have zero understanding of business.

### Business Dynamics in Action

The Game consists of a colourful board, tokens and 4 stacks of cards namely: Opportunity, Innovation, Leverage and Events. The slots on the board bear names of enterprises from 4 industries namely: food & beverage, retail, IT and services and retail.

As the Game is being played, participants will become more aware of their decisionmaking skills and their individual risk tolerance levels. The winning is in the learning itself. It is better to lose through play than to pay expensive lessons in real life.

By playing the game, participants take in the information on the cards, which are based on the real business world. The cards are on Opportunity, Innovation, Leverage and Events. The merits of the board game as a tool for entrepreneurship developments are as follows:

#### **Business Dynamics in Action**

It helps players to appreciate business intricacies and gain an insight of business dynamics in action. The players learn how the various variables interact with each other and at the same time, their risk-taking thresholds are revealed. Playing the game often will sharpen the quality of decisions and develop business acumen.

#### **Ignite the Entrepreneurial Spirit**

It seeks to help them to discover their calling in starting a business and to spur them on to greater heights. Playing the game make the invisible VISIBLE and will heighten players' awareness of the key variables which boost Entrepreneurship Success.

#### **Entrepreneurship Education in a Fun & Entertaining Way**

The bite-sized information on the cards allows business happenings to be easily ingested. This facilitates learning in a fun and entertaining way.

#### **Realistic Game Scenarios**

The cards are based on real life business happenings in Asia. The events are realistic and players could easily relate to it. There are even scenarios on sabotage which highlights the dark side of doing business. The game mirrors real life business situations and is a good reflection of our mindset and behaviour.



## So what's so unique about "Zeros-To-Heros"

- It is a fun game. Engaging the participants. It turns the whole learning process around. No longer is learning boring for students! It is low-pressure learning. High-pressure learning is ineffective.
- It is effective because it disarms the students, opens up their minds to the learning, of whatever is the context and content to be learned.
- It changes behaviour. The Leonardo da Vinci of the 20th Century, Buckminster Fuller used to say, "don't try to change people, if you want them to change, give them a tool to work with, their behaviour will change".
- It is flexible. It allows for learning at different levels, and in different settings. It allows the facilitator to use it in different situations and perhaps as a lead-in to teach other concepts.
- It is repeatable. One of it's strengths is that it allows participants to play the game over and over again until they become very conversant with the various concepts of entrepreneurship.
- it is Creative. Participants will learn to make up their own rules and let go of their fixed mindsets, in this fast changing dynamic world of Entrepreneurship, where rules are being rewritten daily.
- Allow participants to make mistakes, without paying too high a price.

With the global economic slowdown, September-11 incidence and SARS, stepping into the unknown business arena is certainly not for the faint-hearted. However, business success and nurturing budding entrepreneurs need not be random or a hit-or-miss affair. If there is a learning system that can greatly minimize the risks, then it has come at the right time! After all, what better way to prepare for reality than a dress rehearsal, even if it comes in the form of a game board.

*Richard Mak is the Director of Alpha-Plus Training Consultants Pte Ltd. He spent 15 years developing a learning system for the world's 1st board game on entrepreneurship success. He also pioneered Entrepreneurship (Self-Employment Training) programmes with the Singapore Polytechnic more than a decade ago. Some of his students are now successful businessmen. Richard lectured extensively in world-renowned MBA programmes in Singapore, Kuala Lumpur and Jakarta with the University of Leeds, Open University, Maastricht School of Management. He is listed in the International Who's Who directory and has presented research papers at world conferences in Entrepreneurship Development.*



For more information, please visit the website <http://www.innovation.com.sg> or e-mail: [mak@innovation.com.sg](mailto:mak@innovation.com.sg).