

COMMUNITY COLLEGE

ENTREPRENEURSHIP

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Cultivating an
Entrepreneurial Culture



Framing the Brain for Learning



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In his book, *The Tyranny of Experts*, William Easterly begins by telling a tale of activity that occurred in Wood County Ohio (near Bowling Green), February 28th 2010. He vividly paints a picture of farmers being forced at gunpoint by government soldiers from their land.

He describes how some soldiers prevented the farmers from rescuing their homes from the fires they set, while others torched the recent harvest. Even more tragically, an eight-year-old child died in one of the fires.

With the first few sentences of this great book, I was hooked. My mind flooded with questions like, *Why hadn't I heard about this? How did our government facilitate such a blatant violation of liberties and human rights!?* Needless to say, reading further was easy. I wanted to know more and I was learning something.

IMPACT OF STORYTELLING

For an educator, that is the gold standard — getting students to a point where the learning is happening effortlessly and eagerly. And that is the value of storytelling. It makes the brain more receptive to comprehension and retention, leading to better learning outcomes. Storytelling helps frame the brain for learning.

When we developed the Ice House Entrepreneurship Curriculum, we built the program on a sound pedagogy that was extracted from decades of experience, hundreds of interviews, and with input from world renowned subject-matter experts

and advisors. It has the customary academic rigor expected of any college course.

But the delivery mechanism for the vital



information is mostly told through the stories of individuals who used an entrepreneurial mindset to accomplish extraordinary things. This is important for several reasons. First, in order for this program to be used in large-scale deployments, we had to give faculty a course they could easily facilitate but would not require them to be an experienced serial entrepreneur. Instead, they facilitate learning that is distilled from the stories of others.

MAKING ENTREPRENEURSHIP RELATABLE

Another reason to use storytelling in teaching our students is to let them see others in ways they can relate to. This is where many entrepreneurship programs fail, in my humble opinion. They rely on the examples of Bill Gates, Steve Jobs, and Mark Zuckerberg as exemplars of entrepreneurship. Whereas their accomplishments are laudable, their success and reputation are so far removed from what the majority of people believe they are capable of, they might as well be astronauts. It is too easy for students to look at these larger-than-life figures and dismiss their accomplishments as a product of luck, gender, race, or access to resources.

They may be inspirational but in an abstract way. In the Ice House Entrepreneurship program, we tell the stories of a wide variety of individuals.

We have diverse socioeconomic sectors represented. Intentionally, we included several examples of people who overcame significant hardship and adversity to succeed. In doing so, students see others like themselves, from familiar circumstances, persevering and being successful in their lives.

These stories are inspirational but in a relatable way. Another, admittedly more subtle benefit to curate such stories is that it changes the notion that

the professor or institution has to have all the answers. Telling the stories of individuals who found unique ways and resources to achieve their goals, helps students develop problem-solving skills that leverage other resources within their communities. For example, it becomes the impetus for mentoring relationships. And it helps community building which ultimately leads to greater community support for the college.

STORYTELLING HELPS FRAME THE BRAIN FOR LEARNING.

In countless student and faculty reviews, we have been told time and again, the stories in our courses are the most powerful part of the curriculum. Students simply find the material more relatable when shared in story form.

As for my example from William Easterly's book, a few paragraphs later, a plot twist is revealed. I hadn't heard of this tragic story because it didn't happen in the United States. To be certain, these things did happen, just in the Mubende District of Uganda. With the sanction of the World Bank, more than 20,000 people lost their land and livelihood. The author used the power of storytelling to generate an emotional response, make a point about how we react to things beyond our borders, and keep me engaged through the rest of the book - from which I learned many more important things.

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