

This is Jon Sapper for Community Comment.

Is it possible to educate the next Steve Jobs? Interesting question. If you could, how would you do it? There are those who say you can't teach creative, innovative and entrepreneurial thinking. They say you either got it or you don't. But is that true?

The Wall Street Journal had a fascinating article a couple of months ago about how important innovation is to our economic well being as a nation. Innovation has been our competitive edge for generations.

The article goes on to say that to be successful in the 21st century, we must learn to analyze and solve problems more effectively and take calculated risks while learning from failed attempts.

Without trial and error, there is no innovation. Self-confidence is gained by realizing that taking risks and making mistakes is a necessary part of learning, innovation and entrepreneurship.

Some say our country is losing its' competitive edge and becoming a second rate society because our students don't score as well on tests as students from other countries. Is a test score really the measure that we should care about?

Dr. Jong Zhao, a Chinese born scholar who now lives in Eugene and works at the University of Oregon reminds us that the core innovations that drove the digital revolution were created in the United States, that the leaders of the computer and internet industries have been from the United States, and the majority of patents issued worldwide during the last five years went to Americans. But will we stay as the world's best innovator?

In 2008, the United States submitted 231,000 patent applications, over 50% of the applications worldwide. Patents are considered a measure of innovation. China submitted 4,500. Yet, just three years later with a surge in research and development, China is poised to surpass the US in patent applications, according to a Reuters report, with many applications in the digital computing and data communications areas. So much for being known as just manufacturing cheap stuff.

It doesn't bother me that much if students in other countries score higher on tests, but when we start seeing other countries becoming more creative, innovative and entrepreneurial, that needs to get our attention.

Steve Jobs chased his dreams. His dreams became his passion and his passion became his life's purpose. He changed the world.

What's your dream and passion? Are you willing to work hard and take risks to make it happen with a committed sense of purpose? If we encourage others and ourselves to do that in our community, who knows, the next Steve Jobs may be living right here in Humboldt County.

Don't count this country out just yet.

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