

PRIMARY & SECONDARY SOURCES**Reading 8****B**UDDING ENTREPRENEURS

It's the classic question of nature vs. nurture. Are the skills needed to be an entrepreneur inborn, or can they be learned? In the article below, James Pethokoukis shows that both theories may be correct, as he cites examples of young people who started successful businesses. As you read the article, consider whether you might have what it takes to start your own business. Then answer the questions that follow.

There's always been a debate in the business world about whether the skills that make a successful entrepreneur are inborn or can actually be learned.

Brian Hendricks, a 17-year-old high school senior in Potomac, Md., would appear to support the case for the former. At the age of 11, he started a solo Web-design business. But that was just a warm-up. A year or so later, Hendricks was working late one night on his computer when it suddenly crashed. After the PC maker's tech support failed to help him, he decided to become his own tech support. He taught himself to build a computer from the motherboard up, a move that eventually led him to found StartUpPC, his four-employee company that services computers and builds custom machines. Sales can run from a couple of grand a month on up. The company builds two to eight PCs a month and answers from 30 to 70 on-site service calls, pricing its work to undercut competitors like the Geek Squad.

"I only employ high school students, so there's not much overhead," Hendricks says. His workers get \$20 an hour plus expenses, and he is quick to add that his custom-built PCs surpass almost anything out of the box from Dell or Gateway. His advice to other young entrepreneurs: "You've got to have the five p's—planning, persistence, patience, people, and profit."

You can't teach that sort of Dale Carnegie-esque go-getterism, right? David Chernow, CEO of Junior Achievement [JA], isn't buying it. As the head of a group dedicated to imparting business skills to kids, he knows entrepreneurial abilities can be taught. "I was having a conversation about this debate the other day," Chernow says. "And while I agree some people have a desire to take risks and do something creative, I also think you can teach people how to take calculated risks, manage time, and other skills." Certainly, one way to do this is by creating curricula for the classroom, which is mostly what JA does these days. (Only 20,000 or so of the 4 million kids it reaches every year in the United States participate in the creation of new businesses, as many are afraid of liability

risks.) JA recently partnered with the Small Business Administration to create Mind Your Own Business, a Web portal to business advice for kids. In addition, the JA website features Titan, an online game where kids can pretend to run their own business 25 years in the future when, apparently, bangs for men are back in style.

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Teach your children well. But parents are probably the best teachers of entrepreneurship. Take the case of Carrie Kurz. When Kurz, a competitive dancer, was a high school senior in Naperville, Ill., she suffered a knee injury and ended up spending lots of time in doctors' waiting rooms with her mom. "We would talk and bounce ideas off each other," Kurz recalls. One time she said that she wished there were books telling girls how to handle various situations and giving advice for different problems. That desire was the genesis of an idea that became Girlvival, Kurz's company, which sells "survival kits" to help girls deal with life's ups and downs. For instance, there's the \$27.95 "He dumped me" kit, featuring pink tissues, an ice-cream spoon, cookie dough, breakup advice, and a book of inspirational quotes—all packaged in a kicky gel handbag. Kurz estimates she has sold about 1,200 kits online and through three retail stores in California, Florida, and Illinois.

Kurz, now a 20-year-old psychology major at Northern Illinois University, says the best way for parents to teach their kids to be entrepreneurs is by opening up their working life to them. "In psychology, we call this modeling," Kurz explains. "My mom used to take me to work, when she would make sales pitches, when she

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would close deals, and when she would do interviews on the phone. So I got to see her in action and make mental notes." Kurz's mom, Jill, an account executive for a software firm, agrees that parental involvement is key: "I have certainly had failures, and I share when I lose deals, the same as I share when I win deals. It teaches [Carrie and

her sisters] that there are important lessons to be found in both success and failure."

Pethokoukis, James. "Budding Entrepreneurs." *U.S. News & World Report*, December 12, 2005

ANALYZING THE READING

- 1. Does the example of Brian Hendricks support the case for inborn skills or learned skills?

- 2. What are the five elements that Hendricks says young entrepreneurs must have in order to succeed?

- 3. What entrepreneurial skills does David Chernow think people can be taught?

- 4. How does Carrie Kurz think parents can teach their kids to be entrepreneurs?

- 5. Do you think you could be an entrepreneur? Why or why not?

