

### 3 Reasons Skateboarders Make Great Entrepreneurs

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On a brilliant summer's day, skateboarders might seem the last set to be considered entrepreneurs in the making. After all, these teenage kids bear strange clothing and rebellious attitudes and might have offbeat tastes in music. But look a little closer and it's possible to see the makings of the next Mark Zuckerberg, Richard Branson or Steve Jobs. Skaters' controversial traits are precisely the things that let them defy convention. They may be just the folks to do things other people won't when they transition from the world of skateboarding to the business scene.



While there are tens of millions of skateboard owners worldwide, a smaller subset consider the sport not merely a mode of transportation but a lifestyle. They study *The Skateboard Mag*, *Thrasher* and *Transworld* magazines, watch videos at *The Berrics* site and would rather meet skateboarder Andrew Reynolds than Barack Obama. Skaters might spend hours every day learning how to switch hardflip down six stairs or land a nollie overcrock down a handrail. You might think they're dedicated or addicted, but in reality they've learned how to make something difficult something so much fun it doesn't feel like work. Entrepreneurs might be able to relate.

These kids know the industry. They know which companies sponsor which professionals and amateurs. They know that movie director Spike Jonze, who won an Oscar for *Her*, is a part-owner of Girl Skateboards and that the best skateboards are made of seven-ply Canadian maple. They know about shoe manufacturing, analyze clothing materials and patterns and can tell if the cut of a particular pair of jeans is just a centimeter off. Instead of listening during algebra class, they're drawing skateboard designs on graph paper and trying to decide whether Swiss precision bearings are worth the cost.

When these kids grow older, they may not skate three to six hours a day, but they'll never forget what it felt like to try a trick 200 times for six days before landing it once, and then trying another 100 times to land it a second time. They'll never stop noticing stairs and handrails and looking to spot a gap or crack in the cement right where a skater could crouch down and prepare to ollie into a trick. Here are three reasons a 14-year-old skateboarding son, who can't be nudged to do his homework, might end up as the CEO of a successful tech startup someday.

1. **Individualism.** Skateboarding is inherently individualistic. If a skater can't land a trick, he or she can't blame anyone else. Only he (or she) is responsible for the success or failure. While some skaters may have more fun practicing in a group socially, others might have a good time in a driveway or schoolyard alone. This sense of individualism and personal responsibility translates well to the entrepreneurial world. Successful entrepreneurs don't blame others for their failings. When they fall down, they get up and try again. They may encourage one another, but they recognize that each individual must pull his or her own weight.
2. **Creativity.** Skateboarding never stops evolving. Twenty years ago, every trick had already been done, I thought. And yet within the past week I've seen several tricks on skateboard videos that I've never seen before. Skaters are always looking for new tricks to invent or fresh ways to do old ones. Whereas most people look at the stone, metal or concrete terrain of a city as a place to work or eat lunch, a skater sees it as a canvas for creating a masterpiece. He sees the connection between a tree root that has grown under a sidewalk, creating a bump, and the nearby cement ledge. The combination of the two presents an opportunity no one else would notice. This ability to see relationships between physical objects in ways others don't might help skaters see opportunities between two types of business units or how to connect two sets of code to create a more elegant application. The skateboarding industry has a strong design component. After all, there is little difference between one skateboard deck and another. A shoe manufactured by Lakai isn't all that different from one made by Emerica, except for its design and the associated brand. This commoditization of the skateboard industry has produced a rich and vivid assortment of styles and strong brands. Skaters have a heightened sense of color and design, an asset for jobs involving web design, app development, architecture and fashion.
3. **Rebelliousness.** To be a skater is to be a rebel. Skaters must contend with disapproving parents and teachers, power-hungry security guards and skeptical peers. One cannot be a skater without confronting someone who says it's time to stop playing with these useless toys and grow up. But skaters ignore this and keep on doing what they want. The entrepreneur is a rebel by definition. He does things most people won't. He starts businesses nobody else thinks of starting. He sees opportunities nobody else does. He takes risks others aren't willing to take. Rebels offer hope -- that life is not subject merely to destiny but that humans can be in control and their future is a matter of choice. The next time a skater kid passes by, look past the sloppy clothes and rebellious attitude. That kid might be giving you a job a few years from now.