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## Decoding the DNA of Entrepreneurs Past

The traits and markers that make an entrepreneur great are often elusive. After all, greatness isn't usually recognized until after the hard work is done. That's why history always teaches the best lessons. Decoding the DNA of past, gifted entrepreneurs can help us understand how to solve similar problems today. At a recent Northwest Entrepreneur Breakfast meeting Ivan Braiker, CEO of Bellevue-based HipCricket, a mobile marketing company he co-founded in 2004, shared insights he's gleaned from the enduring spirits of entrepreneurs past. Here is a sampling of lessons that endure long after an entrepreneur's reign.

### **Making an Epiphany Real**

*Thomas Watson Sr. (1874-1956) and Thomas Watson Jr. (1914-1993)*

IBM's Watson Sr. built up a global corporation from nothing. He changed the way businesses were run by investing in employees and research. As president and chairman, his son furthered that success by developing and marketing a technology that transformed the world. Both had game changing ideas. They knew how to evangelize their concept with others. Seeing the opportunity for a new industry and value proposition is a gift, but it's only the first step. Making it real requires patience because not everyone will get it and continued focus.

### **Turning Innovation into Value**

*Thomas Edison (1847-1931)*

Innovation is crucial, but new ideas alone won't make a business successful. Ideas need to be turned into products or services that customers will value. The genius of Edison is reflected in the hundreds of everyday products he created that spawned entire industries. Many also forget that for Edison's lighting systems to succeed technical factors had to be

overcome. Competing gas system had to be replaced. Franchise networks need to set up to create and distribute local power. Entrepreneurs today need to consider similar factors: What forces will create and drive demand? How will customers identify product success? What are the competing alternatives, and what enabling factors are required for success?

### **Becoming a Market Leader**

*Estee Lauder (1907-2004)*

Lauder became a giant in the nascent beauty industry by

making sure the quality of her products exceeded the expectations of her target market. She also had a secret weapon--marketing. She knew how to lead, and used innovative marketing practices such as free

demonstrations, makeovers, sampling and "gift with purchase" strategies to create a market for her products. Her techniques made everyday women feel special. But Lauder knew competitors were everywhere and she was clear about what it took to become a leader, "I didn't get here by dreaming or thinking about it, I got here by doing."

### **Spotting and Seizing Opportunities**

*Andrew Carnegie (1835-1919)*

Carnegie inspires on many levels. Before using his wealth to give back as a philanthropist, he built a steel empire. He had the ability to recognize innovations, which proved the difference between shutting down the competition and getting shut down. Committed to leveraging technology innovations, he

shrewdly chose recessions as the time to improve factories when costs were less. When the economy improved he catalyzed the industry with the ability to produce steel more cheaply than competitors. In business and philanthropy he was gifted at imagining how things might be, and did what it took to get there.

### **Creating a New Business Model**

*Milton Hershey (1857-1945)*

Hershey created an iconic product at a price that let millions enjoy what once had been reserved only for the wealthy. Hershey's story is about perseverance and creativity. He was fired from his first apprenticeship job, learned candy making at a second, launched three candy businesses that failed, but didn't stop believing in himself or trying. Ultimately he was able to figure out a way to mass produce the chocolate bar, creating a new business model selling "low-cost luxury".

### **Building a Business**

*Ivan Braiker (alive and well)*

Although Ivan draws strength from visionaries that have traversed the road to success before, his heart and mind are firmly planted in the future. They have to be. Before co-founding HipCricket, he launched two other companies. Success in each depended on being able to see into the future of each industry—and create a new, unproven market value proposition. Selling a vision *before* a market has materialized takes smarts, guts, perseverance and few other tangibles. Here are some truths Ivan's learned along the way:

- Be clear about your vision—if you aren't you will never be able to sell it.
- Ethics and integrity count—your reputation depends on it.



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- Surround yourself with smart people who you can trust, count on, and that play well with others.
- You will never have enough time, money or resources to do everything you want to do.
- Angels take more times than VC's.
- Always do the right thing—especially for your customers.
- You can't take good care of your loved ones if you're not taking good care of yourself.
- If you don't love what you're doing, why are you doing it?

These “Executive Insights” are based on monthly presentations provided by leading entrepreneurs at the Northwest Entrepreneur Network (NWEN.org), a non-profit organization dedicated to helping entrepreneurs succeed. The column is written by Cheryl Isen, founder of Isen & Company, a strategic marketing and public relations firm that helps emerging companies increase corporate visibility and brand awareness. Contact Cheryl at (425) 222-0779, Cheryl@IsenandCo.com or on the web at [www.IsenandCo.com](http://www.IsenandCo.com).